Chérie

MAY BEATRIX McLAUGHLIN

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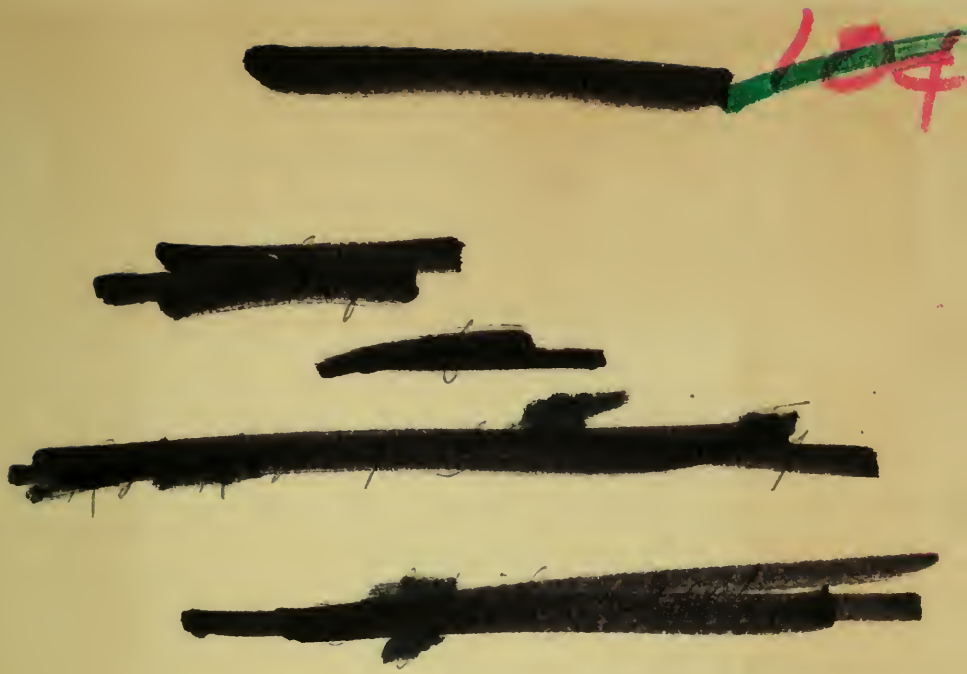

CHÉRIE

"They dropped from my neck, I tell you. . . . Give them to me!"
Page 59.

CHÉRIE

By

MAY BEATRIX M :LAUGHLIN

New York, Cincinnati, Chicago, San Francisco

BENZIGER BROTHERS

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The Letter from America	7
II.	Chérie Meets Her Cousin Nell	16
III.	Aunt Abigail Receives a Letter	26
IV.	Chérie's First Thanksgiving Day	36
V.	Chérie and Nell Walk to Woodhurst	45
VI.	Chérie and Nell Meet with Adventure	54
VII.	Lost in the Fog	63
VIII.	Chérie Goes Home with the Twins	72
IX.	A Surprise for Chérie	81
X.	Home with Nell	90
XI.	Two Unexpected Visitors	99
XII.	The Christmas Turkey	108
XIII.	Nell Turns Detective	115
XIV.	The Arrest	121
XV.	Chérie Enters High School	127
XVI.	Miss Smith	131
XVII.	Chérie Hears from Dot and Dash	137
XVIII.	A Strange Letter	144
XIX.	An Old Acquaintance	147
XX.	Chérie and Nell Receive a Surprise	155
XXI.	Rockaway Park	164
XXII.	Chérie Goes to the Browns	171
XXIII.	Chérie's Hopes Are Realized	177
XXIV.	The Convent of the Sacré Cœur	184

CHÉRIE

CHAPTER I

The Letter from America

IT WAS almost five. Presently the small clock on the mantel would broadcast this fact in its abrupt, squeaky tones. The room was almost dark now. All day long the rain had beaten persistently against the windows, wind-driven with November force; streaking the small panes with tiny rivulets that trickled down steadily to the sills below.

In the ever-growing darkness about her, a young girl stood, facing the dull gray light still filtering in through the rain-washed glass. A girl of fifteen or thereabouts, straight and slim; her head held high with a little touch of dignity; a mannerism that enhanced the flower-like beauty of her skin and the haunting expression in her large, dark eyes. And as she stood there in her black gown, gazing sadly at a letter that the *concierge* had just placed in her hand, Chérie Lawson's utter loneliness was only too evident.

"From my aunts . . . from America," she murmured, finally deciphering the post-mark on the envelope. "Monsieur le Curé let them know."

Suddenly her eyes filled with tears; she could see nothing. Impatiently, she rubbed the moisture from her lashes. She must have a light, and learn what her aunts had to say. Groping her way to the table she felt about the cloth until she found some matches

lying loose beside the student lamp with its big green shade. And as the light flooded about her, she slipped into a big chair, drawing up her feet, tailor-fashion, beneath her. She glanced again at the square envelope, at the angular handwriting, and shivered.

"Miss Mehitable Lawson," she whispered to herself, dismally. "It is strange to be called . . . Mehitable."

She opened the envelope. Besides the sheet of paper it contained was a check, made payable to herself. For a moment, she gazed at the small slip of paper in amazement; then with a dull ache in the region of her heart, unfolded the letter, and read the following:

"My dear Mehitable:

"It was with surprise we received the news of your father's death. Frederick Lawson was my youngest sister's only child, and his parents died when he was but an infant. So, with my sister Eliza's help, I brought him up. We lavished every care upon him, and he repaid us with disobedience and ingratitude. He never tried to please us. Against our wishes, he took up art as a career; throwing away several chances to start in the business world which had been offered to him by friends of the family. And, also against our wishes, he went to Paris and married a girl we had never seen. The money he inherited from his parents he took with him, so there is nothing here belonging to him, and you have no claim upon us whatsoever. But the fact that he bestowed upon you his mother's name, Mehitable, shows that he had some love left for his own people; and because of this we wish you to come to America, and make your home with us."

Then followed instructions about the journey and the enclosed check.

"I thought it advisable to send a check," the letter ended, "knowing it is hard sometimes to realize ready money on investments. So you can consider this a loan, and when things are settled you can pay it back."

That was all, except the signature—"Abigail Greenwood."

For a long time, Chérie stared at the stiff, uncompromising characters forming the name. A . . . loan? How was she to repay a . . . loan? She did not know. Her father's investments? Why, investments meant money! What money had her poor father? As long as she could remember she had lived here in these shabby rooms, in this shabby quarter of Paris with her parents. This room had been her father's studio. Here he painted what he rather contemptuously termed potboilers; the small squares and oblongs that he sold to the neighboring dealers. Happy times followed these sales, as a rule. They bought new clothes, and had better food; sometimes even a chicken graced their table, baked in the big oven across the street. Those were festive occasions! And how nice they all looked then, dressed in their best; her mother, especially, with a rose in her black hair, and a string of beads about her throat! She knew her father admired her, too, the way he gazed at her throughout the meal. Her dear little mother, so unselfish, so loving! So merry, also! Laughing and talking, and singing little songs for their amusement.

She remembered it all, and she remembered more. She remembered the times when there were no sales. Weeks, yes months, when their fare was very meager, and the laughter within these walls not so ready. But how things changed when the fickle public again snapped up the little landscapes with the trees, the

bits of blue sky, the cattle, and the broad fields of growing things! Then there would be a demand for more, and that meant many trips with her father into the surrounding country on sketching tours. Sometimes her mother went—but he always took his little Chérie. And while he was busily engaged with his work, she ran about, plucking the pretty blossoms growing in the grass bordering the lanes. Then, when the sun proclaimed high noon, he would bring milk from one of the near-by farmhouses, and call her to luncheon. And what fun they had opening the tiny basket, that often contained little surprises prepared by those dear, loving hands at home!

Yes, they had been happy, oh so happy, until the good God called her mother to Himself. That was three years ago, and now her dear father was dead—and she was alone. How good he had been to her! So gentle, teaching her English, that she might speak it well when they went to his America! How he had loved America! How he had hoped against hope that elusive Fame would yet come to him, bringing riches, enabling him to return to his native country.

"I'll never go back a failure, Chérie, never," he told her, time and time again. "I couldn't do that."

And now he was dead, and she was going in his place, with neither fame nor fortune to her account. Going to a strange land, to live among strangers. True, they were relatives, and her father had lived with them; but what did she know of them? Not much. Only the few anecdotes he had recounted of his boyhood days spent in the old Greenwood mansion, near Boston, with his aunts . . . and this letter. That was all. And she was going to this woman and her

sister. She shivered as if she were cold. How could any one speak ill of the dead? How could these two women hold spite even after the grave had closed over the boy they had professed to love?

Certainly the outlook was not promising for poor Chérie; but she must go. There was no other way. She had no relatives living on the maternal side. She was absolutely alone here. And when she left, she would be leaving behind all that stood for the little French girl, her mother. The girl within whose dark eyes Fred Lawson had read solace for his homesickness and his disappointments. The little wife who had helped and cheered him through dark and bitter days; the little mother rocking her baby to sleep—making a picture that was always wonderful to him.

"What shall we call the wee tyke?" he had remarked a few days after its birth, watching the young mother crooning over her little one.

She glanced up. "Marie, of course—as mine, in honor of our blessed Lady. And also for your own mother . . . what is that name, Fred?" she asked, her pretty, halting English interspersed with French words and little motions of her hand.

"Mehitable," he answered, pleased. "That's right. Let her be Mehitable. You are Marie, and there is only one Marie for me in this whole world," fondly stroking the dark, shining hair.

"Ma-heet-abul," she repeated, looking up at him, helplessly, "it is impossible!"

How he had laughed! Not at the name, because that had belonged to his mother, and he revered her memory; but at the pronunciation of the formidable bunch of consonants by the soft voice of his little

French wife. Great Scott, Marie could never call her that! It was impossible.

"Chérie," she appealed to the now awakened baby, "what would you have? Tell me, little one!"

Fred started. "Why not Chérie? That's pretty," he suggested.

And so she had been Chérie even from that time. Monsieur le Curé, who had himself baptized her Marie Mehitable, called her so. No wonder that the baptismal name was strange to her; as strange as the aunts to whom she was going, and the distant country in which they lived.

To-day, Monsieur le Curé had been to see her, and tried to console her, braving the rain on her account, she was so much in his mind. An infinite pity stirred his heart for this forlorn child, bereft of her natural guardians by death. He inquired about her aunts in America . . . had she heard from them yet? He hoped they would respond. There was so little he could do to help her. He was poor, and his people were poor. But he was at her service—she must always call on him.

All these thoughts raced through her brain like quicksilver, as she sat there, staring at the letter in her hand. She was only fifteen, and to a girl of fifteen grief such as hers could make all about her seem dark and hopeless. To-morrow, Monsieur le Curé would come again, and she would show him this letter. He would tell her what to do. In a few days even the right to remain under this roof would end; and she would be compelled to leave the house that had sheltered her so long. Already other possible tenants had been to see the rooms, and for aught she knew the place was rented literally over her head now.

The little clock on the mantel burred. At one time

it had boasted of chimes, every fifteen minutes of the hour; but that was ages ago, when Chérie was a tiny girl. She held up her head, and listened, counting the six strokes that followed.

"Nanette?" she said aloud, glancing toward the door, expectantly; "what is keeping Nanette? Perhaps she'll not come any more. I have no money to pay her. Poor faithful Nanette!"

And Nanette had been faithful. She had bought the food and cooked the dinner every night for Chérie and her father after Mrs. Lawson died. Before that she had only been employed in the household, periodically, to help with extra cleaning. She was married and had a large family. There was plenty for her to do at home, but she needed the money. Her husband, Jacques, was temperamental, sometimes working, oftener shirking, thus throwing an unequal share of life's burdens upon his loving and devoted wife. But she never complained, and was always cheerful. And no matter how busy she was, she had always managed to attend to the buying and cooking of the one meal that Mr. Lawson required daily. For the rest, he and Chérie had done for themselves; and only an occasional burn or cut gave mute evidence of their many trials, as they endeavored to perfect themselves in the gentle art of housekeeping.

"There is Nanette, now!" she exclaimed, jumping up from her chair, as a sound reached her from the hall. "Oh, I am glad! It is so lonesome here to-night."

The door opened, and a stout woman, with a beaming smile lighting up her rubicund countenance, entered the room. Raindrops glistened on her bonnet and cloak; and she was carrying a basket with a clean towel tucked neatly over the top.

"I cooked your dinner at my house to-night, made-

moiselle,'' she told Chérie, revealing to view a platter, on which was arranged appetizing food. She made room on the table by pushing aside the books, and spread a clean linen cloth, daintily placing thereon china and silver she took from the buffet in the corner. ''Dinner is served!'' she announced grandly, drawing out the chair from the table.

Chérie seated herself with great dignity, thus pleasing Nanette; and placed the letter and the check beside her plate.

''This letter is from my aunt in America, Nanette,'' she observed. ''She wishes me to go to her.''

''And you will go? Oh, yes, mademoiselle,'' she advised, eagerly. ''My heart aches for you. I dream of you by night; I think of you by day. I say to all about me, what will become of the little one?''

''You are so kind, Nanette,'' said Chérie. ''I should like to tell you about it.''

''And why not,'' she murmured. ''Tell me what you will, mademoiselle.''

''It is about my aunt,'' explained Chérie, ''about this check that she sent me''; as she picked it up and held it towards Nanette.

''Give it to Monsieur le Curé. He will have it cashed for you, and buy your tickets for the journey. Already he has instructed me to polish up the furniture so it may look nice and bring more money for you at the sale.''

Chérie clapped her hands together. ''Good! Maybe, then, there will be money to pay my aunt back,'' she cried.

Nanette looked at her in surprise. ''But, mademoiselle, your aunt wouldn't take back the money?''

''Oh, yes, Nanette! She says so in her letter. It is a loan—so I must pay it back.''

"Ah, well . . . it takes all kinds to make a world, my child. Bother your head no more about it. Try the cutlet . . . and this salad."

After Nanette had taken her departure, Chérie curled herself up in a heavy steamer rug that had belonged to her father. Fearfully she glanced about her. Every shadow seemed to menace her. To reach her bed, she would have to walk across the room. She shivered nervously. She couldn't do it. No, she would stay where she was for the night. To-morrow in the light of the new day, she would be herself again. To-morrow she would tell Monsieur le Curé about the letter and the check, and she would make him promise to send to her aunt the money realized from the sale. Then the loan would be paid, and all would be well.

A drowsy feeling crept over her. She let her head rest against the frayed silk of the cushion on the back of the chair, and in that moment, she slept. But her sleep was fitful, owing, perhaps, to the uncomfortable position she was obliged to assume to keep from slipping out of the chair to the floor. Her dreams, also, were disturbing. Strange dreams of a strange land, filled with wild beasts waiting to devour her; and of a beautiful fairy who always rescued her. A beautiful fairy with golden curls and a most bewitching smile.

CHAPTER II

Chérie Meets Her Cousin Nell

CHÉRIE followed Thomas up the steps to the old-fashioned front door with its iron knockers, desiring yet dreading to meet these unknown relatives. She felt weak. The trip over had been very rough, and she had suffered in consequence, at times being so ill that she had thought every moment was her last.

And how Nanette had deplored the necessity of the voyage!

"Alas!" she had murmured, pity in her voice, tears in her bright dark eyes, "that I could not be with thee, little one!"

Dear Nanette had been so good to her, so thoughtful. She could never forget such kindness, kindness that had spared her suffering and humiliation. "Of course," she had insisted, "mademoiselle must come with me to my house and rest . . . it is so lonesome here."

And Chérie went with her to the few small rooms, where Nanette's children welcomed her; and even Jacques, her temperamental spouse, chose to be amiable to the young girl, so sad and so gentle, surprising his wife by his efforts to entertain their guest.

So she was spared the sorrow of seeing the only home she had ever known, dismantled at the sale. She did not see the strangers carrying away the bargains "knocked down" to them by the garrulous, over-facetious auctioneer; indulging his wit at the expense of well-worn pieces of furniture, frayed

hangings, and damaged bits of bric-a-brac and china. She only knew that everything had been sold with the exception of the one big canvas, which as long as she could remember had been turned to the wall in a dark corner of the living room. She had been told that this picture was to bring them money; that some day her father would finish it and become famous; and among themselves it had always been called "the masterpiece."

Monsieur le Curé knew this, and evidently believed it, refusing to have it listed for the sale. "No," he objected, "that picture is to be carried to my house. . . . I shall take care of it."

And later he told Chérie that he would keep it until she came for it . . . perhaps to finish it herself!

Chérie sighed, and the old man turned to glance at her, assisting her to the porch where he was standing. She was still weak, he thought, noting her pale cheeks, and needed rest; and Thomas raised the knocker and brought it down with great force. As iron crashed on iron, Chérie shrank back against one of the pillars, glancing about as if uncertain what to do.

"This is the house, missy," said Thomas, in a stage whisper; "and many's the time Master Fred fooled them all, knocking on the door with all his might to bring out Miss Abigail, and then dodging back to hide behind the lilac bushes. And say! She'd be just as mad as a wet hen!"

Thomas was the Misses Greenwood's hired man, so of course he had been sent to meet the incoming liner, and to extricate Chérie from the red tape that entangles any immigrant landing on our shores. In

this he succeeded with very little trouble, owing to the credentials he carried, proving as they did that Miss Abigail had sent for her niece, and was assuming all responsibility of her future, caring and providing for her until she would be able to support herself.

On the train, Thomas, in his slow, kind way, tried to entertain his charge. He felt sorry for this slip of a girl, who had come such a distance, alone. She was so pale and her eyes were so sad. So he launched into stories of her father's boyhood, telling one amusing incident after another just to bring the smiles into play about her drooping, red-lipped mouth. He had liked her father, the bright-faced boy, the torment of Miss Abigail's life, and had always, when possible, shielded him from her wrath. But that was years ago, before Fred Lawson threw everything aside for Art; before it beckoned him on to Paris, promising Fame. Fame, the will-o'-the-wisp that entices and eludes, leaving behind disappointment, despair and broken hearts.

"We used to go fishing together," Thomas was saying as they stood waiting for a taxi. "You see he liked to go with me. He felt big to be with a man. And I enjoyed fishing more'n anything then. I wa'n't as old as I'm now, and," removing his hat to show the point of his little joke, "there was more between me and heaven."

Chérie glanced at his shining bald head, and smiled. She felt grateful to him, knowing that he had tried to make the ride in the crowded day-coach less tedious. But, as the old man lifted the heavy knocker for the second time, she wondered if her aunts would be as considerate as this stranger had been. She hoped so, though a feeling of depression was creeping over

her, and she closed her lids together to keep back the tears.

"So! This is Mehitable!" came a high-pitched voice.

Chérie opened her eyes, and beheld a short woman, whose unwieldy figure almost filled the doorway. This must be one of her aunts. Which? Surely not the one who had written that letter!

"How odd she is!" thought Chérie, gazing at the bright rose-colored silk dress a young girl might have worn; and at the fancy buckled shoes with the highest of high heels. A round, fat face, dimpled and smiling, still bore traces of former beauty; but passing years and an easy disposition, together with a love of sweets, had tripled that chin, and added so to her weight that the poor creature had become almost a burden to herself. "You dear, dear child!" she went on, drawing Chérie to her and kissing her. "But . . . you're not a bit like Fred! You must be like your mother."

"I am," murmured Chérie; "my father always said so."

"Well, well! Come in, child!" and she drew back into the hall, allowing her niece to enter. Just then Thomas came up the steps with the small trunk perched on his shoulder and a rug across his arm.

"Take them upstairs, Thomas, and leave them in the small room at the back. Just think, Mehitable," turning to Chérie, "you are to have your father's room. Isn't that nice?"

"Yes, acquiesced Chérie. "You are kind to think of it."

"Well now! Leave your satchel in the hall, you can take it to your room later. In a few minutes we'll have lunch. Are you tired? Did Thomas get you any refreshment? Hang your wraps there. That's right!

Now you'll feel more at home. Talking of home just reminds me that Abigail ought to be here. She went to a meeting hours ago."

Chérie shook her head hopelessly. She wished her aunt would not speak so fast. It was hard to understand her. But there was one thing she had found out. Aunt Abigail was not at home. Then this must be Aunt Eliza. Aunt Eliza didn't seem to care whether she was answered or not. She just went on talking, talking, talking! "But she is kind," thought Chérie, following her as she waddled across the hall, high heels tap-tapping heavily under her weight.

"This is the living room," she told Chérie as they entered. "The dining room is on the other side, but we'll wait until Abigail comes. I can't imagine what's keeping her," and she drew aside one of the curtains draping a window and looked out.

Chérie sank into a corner of the big couch facing the fireplace and gazed about the comfortably furnished room.

"How it rained yesterday, and how nice it is today!" continued Aunt Eliza, without turning from the window. "It reminds me of an admirer I had once! Stormy one day, bright the next. Do you know ——"

A bang, loud and sharp, came from the hall, and a moment later the door of the living room was thrust wide and in the opening stood a young girl about Chérie's age, with bobbed golden hair framing her bright face. She was wearing a sport suit of green, and carried a hat to match in her hand.

Chérie sprang to her feet startled, and gazed in astonishment at the lovely maid. Who was she? From whence had she come? As she gazed, a strange, elusive

memory flashed across her mind, leaving the vague impression that she had seen the girl before.

"Hello, Frenchy!" she cried now, entering the room and rushing over to Chérie. "Hello! Welcome to America!"

"Oh, Eleanor, what a noise you make!" complained Miss Eliza, turning from the window to shake an admonishing finger in her direction. "What will your cousin think? But do you know, I had an admirer once who was just like that, so ——"

"Oh, my cousin doesn't mind noise," interrupted Eleanor, kissing each cheek that Chérie so demurely presented. "Say you like it, anyway!"

"Of course, I like it," answered Chérie, earnestly, "and I like you, Cousin Eleanor!"

"Then call me Nell. If you do, you and I shall be the best of friends," retorted Eleanor.

"So demonstrative, so very demonstrative," reiterated Miss Eliza, clinging to the thread of her reminiscences. Nell shot a glance toward her aunt. She understood. Aunt Eliza was delving into the past again.

"Aunt Eliza was a reigning belle not so many years ago," she told Chérie, smiling, "and had hosts of admirers, hadn't you, Aunt?"

"What a tease you are, Eleanor!" expostulated Miss Eliza, but even Chérie saw how pleased she was. "I was not to blame for my beauty, I'm sure. . . . I couldn't help that."

"Of course not," agreed Nell. "When do we eat? I'm starved."

"Luncheon was ready long ago," answered Miss Eliza, looking again toward the window. "We've been waiting for Abigail. I can't imagine what's keeping her . . . and she knows how Sarah objects . . . try-

ing to reheat the food. I expect it's stone cold, we've been waiting so long."

"If it is, Sarah'll be wild," observed Nell. "Let's throw in our hats first."

"Why . . . our hats?" asked Chérie, surprised.

"Oh, to see how she'll treat them!" laughed Nell. "If she jumps on them, then that'll be our cue to stay out, don't you understand?"

"We'll wait no longer," declared Miss Eliza, impatiently, as she led the way across the hall into the sunny dining room, with its antique furniture and cabinets of beautiful china.

Sarah, a tall, thin woman of middle age, came in from the kitchen, and cast a sour look at Miss Eliza, her lips pressed together as though trying to hold back the words she would like to utter.

"Bring in the luncheon, Sarah," said Miss Eliza, glancing everywhere but in Sarah's direction.

Sarah flounced out and flounced back again, registering her displeasure by an unnecessary clattering of the dishes as she placed them on the table.

"You see, my niece from Paris is with us, Sarah," remarked Miss Eliza, pleasantly, wishing to placate the autocrat of the Greenwood kitchen, by giving her this introduction to Chérie.

"Umph!" grunted the woman, "so I see!" and she bumped a platter of spaghetti down with such force in front of Miss Eliza, that drops of tomato sauce spattered the white cloth. She offered no apology, glaring defiance at them instead as long as she was in the room.

"Pleasant creature!" remarked Nell, as the door into the kitchen slammed. "But she knows that she can get by with it. That's the trouble. She's been here all her life, and they couldn't get on without her."

"She has too much work, perhaps," excused Chérie; "she may be tired." And then her thoughts flew back to good-natured Nanette—Nanette, who thought nothing a trouble to please those she served—Nanette, so willing, so courteous—Nanette, the adviser, the true friend!

"Maybe," Nell was saying, "but one thing is sure, she makes everybody else tired. What did you say, Aunt Eliza?"

"I just remarked that John Smith's nose was a teeny, weeny bit too long for manly beauty," said Miss Eliza, going on to describe at length the perfections and imperfections of an erstwhile admirer.

"We'll take a walk after lunch," whispered Nell to Chérie, under cover of her aunt's chatter. "You might as well see what Oldville looks like. It isn't much of a place, and has only one redeeming feature, which is its proximity to Boston. Is that anything to write home about? You are, my dear cousin, at present only a short trolley ride from the Hub of the Universe, as it is sometimes called."

"But I have no occasion to write," said Chérie, sadly, in her precise English; "I have no home."

Something seemed to swell in Nell's throat. She coughed a little to clear it. "Poor little kid!" she thought, pity in her heart. "Oh, you poor little kid!" And then she teased, laughingly. "Well, don't brag about being so dumb—just admit it. That was only slang I used."

"Oh," ejaculated Chérie, a trifle crestfallen, understanding intuitively that she had taken Nell too literally. "I shall know again."

"Oh, you'll improve with my teaching," Nell observed, jokingly, "but don't let the Misses Greenwood hear you. They think I'm hopeless, and I guess

they're right, for try as I may, I forget. And then slang is so apt; there are times nothing else fits. So what can a poor girl do?''

Chérie nodded acquiescence, as she would have done, probably, had she understood. She didn't wish Nell to think she was dull. Nell was so clever, so beautiful! And she had found this wonderful cousin here in her aunt's house! Did she live here? Would she always be with her? She was too shy to ask these questions yet. Later she would screw up her courage, and find out everything from dear Nell. Nell would tell her. She was a friend. A friend? She had never had a friend before, a companion of her own age. Taught at home by her father, she had had no opportunity to meet other girls, and so had been denied the companionship school gives.

''Have you finished?'' asked Nell, breaking in upon her thoughts. If they were to have a walk, they had better go at once. Any minute, now, Aunt Abigail would be here, and Aunt Abigail had a happy faculty of upsetting other people's plans.

''Not quite,'' answered Chérie, apologetically.

''Don't hurry,'' Nell told her, ''only the sooner we go, the better. I'll explain later.''

Chérie was finishing her luncheon. She glanced about the room. How bright it was! And everything was in such good order—no frayed silk cushions, no broken-down chairs, no decrepit tables. Surely, one could be happy in this lovely home!

''I am ready now, Nell,'' and Chérie arose from the table.

''Ready?'' repeated Miss Eliza, surprise in her voice. ''Where are you going, Mehitable?''

''We are going for a walk, Aunt Eliza,'' answered

Chérie, not at all aware that Nell mentally designated her a "little goose for spilling the beans."

"That's what comes of having anything to do with a foreigner," thought Nell, in disgust. "She never knew that I was doing this on the quiet!"

"But you can't go!" objected Miss Eliza. "Not before Abigail comes. Why, she'd scold if Mehitable weren't here . . . you know she would, Eleanor."

"And what if she does? You're not afraid of her, are you, Aunt?" said Nell. "What could she do to you?"

"Nothing, of course," assuming a courage she did not feel. "But at times, you know as well as I, that Abigail Greenwood is unreasonable. At times, I say," looking apprehensively toward the door, as if half-expecting to see her sister standing there.

"I know, Aunt Eliza. But we won't be long," promised Nell, as she caught Chérie by the hand. "Maybe we'll be back before Aunt Abigail comes home."

"Well, run along!" yawned Miss Eliza, getting to her feet. "I'll rest here a minute," and she settled herself, comfortably, in the depths of the big chair. Already her eyes were closing, as she leaned back against the cushion, the sun streaming about her through the three windows of the bay, wherein her chair was so invitingly placed for an afternoon nap.

Nell put her arm about Chérie, and the two girls stole quietly from the room, leaving Aunt Eliza to her dreams.

CHAPTER III

Aunt Abigail Receives a Letter

THE sun shone brightly as they walked down the path to the gate. Thomas was raking the leaves from the grass, still sodden after yesterday's heavy rain, but as they passed he looked up and saluted them with a broad grin. It was nice to have young people about, he thought; they livened things up a bit.

"Which way shall we go?" asked Nell, glancing up and down the street. "To the heart of things in Oldville, or away from the haunts of man into the country lanes? Which?"

"You said Oldville," ventured Chérie. "It would be nice to go there, I think."

"Then Oldville it is," declared Nell, emphatically. "But, first, tell me what Aunt Eliza calls you."

"What she calls me?" queried Chérie, a little puzzled frown wrinkling her smooth forehead. "What do you mean?"

"What is your name? You have always been referred to as my cousin, our niece from Paris, or Fred's girl, before you came."

"Yes, they would say that! Mehitable is the name that ——"

"Mehitable!" mimicked Nell; for as usual, Chérie's pronunciation of the name hardened its every syllable. "That doesn't sound like a name! It sounds more like a disease! Couldn't they do better than

that for a nice little white girl like you? Is that the only name they gave you?"

"No; I have Marie, also, but my dear father said that belonged to my mother. . . . So they called me Chérie."

"Chérie, Chérie?" repeated Nell. "Oh, how sweet! And it just suits you . . . Chérie! Dearie! It's lovely!"

"You like it, Nell?" cried the girl, relief in her voice.

"I love it," Nell assured her. "I couldn't have done better than that for you myself!"

"Then I shall be Chérie to you, Nell?" she persisted, eagerly.

"Always," replied Nell. "As long as I live." And Nell pressed the thin arm within her own as they turned toward the business section of the town leisurely.

And as they walked, they continued their conversation. Chérie told Nell how delightful it was to be called Chérie again. She had thought Chérie was lost forever in that name Mehitable. It was a nice name, perhaps, in America—but in France!

As she talked Nell listened. After all, it was only a name, and one name was as good as another, she supposed. But she was thankful that Eleanor had been given her instead. There were enough handicaps in life without so harsh a name as that. And Chérie was so sure she was rid of it! How about Aunt Abigail? Would she consent to throw her sister's name into the discard? Nell didn't think so—there were rocks ahead for Chérie in that quarter, surely! She must warn her!

"Listen, Chérie," she began, "Aunt Abigail will never call you anything but Mehitable. You can bank

on that, so don't expect it. Of course, I'll call you Chérie as long as I'm here, but when I go——"

"Go?" gasped Chérie in surprise, shrinking back. "I thought you lived here, Nell."

"Here? Oh, no! I live in New York City," Nell told her with an air of pride. "Didn't you hear me say so? Is it possible that I have neglected to state that fact before?"

"You said nothing about it . . . I thought you lived with our aunts . . . that we should always be together." Her voice faltered; she turned away her head. What could she do without Nell? How could she stay here . . . with Aunt Eliza . . . and Aunt Abigail?

"Oh, no," went on Nell, "I'm here to spend the holidays. As a rule my parents accompany me, but this time business interfered with my father's plans. He had to go west and he wanted my mother with him for the trip. He thought the change might rid her of a cough that bothers her, and that I could come on and fill the bill."

"Fill, bill?" repeated Chérie, wondering what that meant.

Nell laughed. "Oh, take his place, you know, at the festive board. To have dinner with the Misses Greenwood on Thanksgiving Day."

"And what is Thanksgiving Day, Nell?" asked Chérie, interested.

"Thanksgiving is a wonderful holiday in this country," answered her cousin. "Did you ever hear your father speak of it, Chérie?"

Chérie shook her head. "Never, Nell. He spoke of one holiday, the Fourth of July . . . he said that that was America's greatest day."

"So it is. He was right," assented Nell. "But

there's a different kind of greatness attached to Thanksgiving Day. On Thanksgiving Day we are to be thankful for the prosperity of our country, and we show our gratitude by eating all the turkey and mince pie we can cram into our poor abused stomachs."

"When is this Thanksgiving Day?" inquired Chérie, eagerly.

"Thursday, the day after to-morrow," Nell informed her, "and that's another thing you should know, Chérie—that Thanksgiving always falls on Thursday . . . now, for pity's sake, don't ask me why."

"Your father and mine were cousins?" queried Chérie, ignoring Nell's pretended rebuff. Her relationship to Nell was what she wanted to find out—she wondered how they could be cousins.

"Yes. There were four Greenwood sisters. Two married, and two remained single. Mehitable and Eleanor were our respective grandmothers. Your father was Mehitable's son, and my father was Eleanor's. I suppose after all that explanation it is just as clear to you as mud."

But Chérie understood and she felt satisfied. Nell belonged to her. She was a cousin.

"And Dad told me," continued Nell, "that Aunt Eliza was considered a beauty in her youth but that Aunt Abigail didn't want her to marry. So she criticized and made little of all her beaux to get rid of them and she succeeded. Poor Aunt Eliza, harassed and worried, fell ill, and months after, when she regained her bodily health, they found she was weak mentally."

"Oh, what a pity!" sighed Chérie, "I'm so sorry for her."

"The strange thing about it is that she seems happier in her foolishness than Aunt Abigail does, who possesses her full share of brains. You have yet to meet her, Chérie."

"I hope she likes me."

"Let us hope so," remarked Nell, grimly. "It will make things much pleasanter all around, if she does. She doesn't care much for me, but I'm not here long enough to matter. Still, she has once or twice told me what she thinks of me. She never was a beauty like her sister, so she can dress as comfortably and be as disagreeable as she pleases; added wrinkles have no terrors for her. She's above all that nonsense."

Meanwhile the subject of this discussion between the cousins, Miss Abigail, was on her way home by another route, and so missed her nieces by several minutes. The ladies' meeting that morning had been tediously prolonged by one or two malcontents, who resented Miss Greenwood's high and mighty attitude in certain matters and offered all sorts of opposition to anything and everything she proposed.

And so her temper, never angelic at any time, left a great deal to be desired as she entered the house where she reigned supreme. On the hall table, as she was passing, she noticed a letter, and she wondered why it had been left there. Hanging up her cloak and hat, she fumbled for her glasses, and adjusted them on her nose.

"Yes, it's for me," she said, picking up the missive and holding it closer to her eyes, "but the writing is not familiar."

She broke the seal, and took from the envelope a sheet of thin paper, covered on both sides with fine, closely written words. For some time she studied the contracted characters in silence, but finally master-

ing the contents, she frowned heavily; then, crumpling the paper and envelope together she thrust them in her pocket.

"So," she muttered, wrathfully, "that's the way the land lies. I've lost my money and I have a pauper on my hands. This man writes that there was nothing left, after the bills were paid. . . . I suppose she's here . . . you couldn't lose a bad penny as easy as that."

As she crossed the hall she saw the small black satchel where Chérie had left it. She was here, then! There had been no trouble about her landing—Thomas had followed instructions.

"I suppose they are still at luncheon," she thought, as she opened the door into the dining room. As she stood on the threshold Miss Eliza awakened with a start. She rubbed her eyes and yawned. Miss Abigail gave a little dry cough which made her sister turn sleepy eyes upon her.

"You are late, Abigail," she observed, mildly. "What kept you? We couldn't wait any longer for our lunch. Sarah was real put out as it was. Indeed she was quite nasty."

"Where's the girl?" interrupted Miss Abigail, sharply, looking with contempt at Miss Eliza, who was struggling to get to her feet.

"Eleanor took her for a little walk, Abigail," she answered, as if to make light of an act that called for criticism. At last, she had managed to balance herself despite the absurd high heels on her shoes, and stumped toward the table.

"You'll break your ankle some day with those things," sniffed Miss Abigail in a tone of disgust, "and it will serve you right. A woman of your age ought to have more sense."

"But they're so pretty, Abigail," she sighed, "and I love pretty things. I always did, you know . . . and I'm not changed in that."

"No, you haven't changed in that," agreed Miss Abigail, with a sneer; "that's about all you ever thought of, my dear Eliza."

"I always dressed well, didn't I?" eagerly, "and that reminds me of what Homer Brown used to say——"

"I don't wish to hear anything of that person, Eliza," severely. "What is this girl like?"

"She is very nice, quiet, and well-behaved; and really, Abigail, you should speak to Sarah. I was so ashamed of her——"

"Then that was the time to speak to her," snapped Miss Abigail. "Sarah is like every one else around here, she goes as far as she dares. As for Eleanor, she gets beyond herself. What right had she to take that girl away before I saw her? I wish I'd never sent for her. But that was your fault. I don't know why I listened to you . . . I might have known!"

"There was nothing else to do, Abigail. She is poor Fred's girl!" Miss Eliza touched the bell for Sarah. Abigail must be hungry.

"What of it? We had enough of him, didn't we? Is that fresh tea, Sarah?" and Miss Abigail took her place at the table.

"Yes, ma'am," answered the woman in her surly way, placing the silver teapot down with a thump.

"That's very nice, Sarah. I need a cup of tea," remarked Miss Abigail quite pleasantly.

Miss Eliza sighed, and made her way to the door, but as she passed a mirror hanging above the serving table, she smiled foolishly, and patted a few stray hairs into place on her elaborately marceled head.

It was almost four when the girls returned. Nell had shown her cousin the few stores clustered together which constituted the business section of the town; the two churches built many years ago by the old settlers; their clapboarded sides always showing weather stains, despite the periodical coats of paint applied by the various committees formed for that purpose; the new brick school; and its predecessor, now used as an annex for first year High, shrunk into insignificance beside it.

"If you are any higher than that, Chérie, you'll have to go into the next town," Nell was saying as they gazed at the old frame, one-storied building, a square-shuttered tower masking its iron-tongued bell. "Of course it will depend on your transfer."

"I have no transfer," Chérie informed her, ruefully. "I never attended any school . . . my father taught me."

Nell looked at her, doubtfully. "Then I suppose they'll just have to find out how much you know by a test."

Chérie gave her a startled glance, and then drew herself up a little. "I have no fear," she declared, in a tone much braver than the beating of her heart warranted, "I shall take the test."

"I'll tell the world you will!" observed Nell, admiringly. She was right there with the right kind of grit, this little cousin of hers. "Let us go this way, Chérie," she continued, "and I'll show you the road the trolleys take to Boston."

They wandered on without thought of passing time, until Nell, with a start, realized that it would be wise to return at once, if they wished to get back before sunset.

Miss Abigail saw them coming up the path. She was standing in the doorway, facing them. So that was the girl! That little dark thing with Eleanor. Just a foreigner! And nothing could be worse than that in her estimation. To her prejudiced mind there was no beauty in the creamy skin or the lovely dark eyes. She resented both as being indicative of the girl's French ancestry. Fred's taste had equaled only his lack of sense, she thought, bitterly, as her nieces neared her.

"Speaking of angels," began Nell, "well, you know the rest, aunt!" she finished, as she and Chérie came up on the porch.

"Yes, I know it," grimly, her eyes fastened on Chérie.

"This is Chérie, Aunt Abigail," introduced Nell.

"Chérie?" repeated Miss Abigail, acidly; "and pray tell me, Eleanor, who is Chérie? You must mean Mehitable."

Shyly, Chérie put her hand into Miss Abigail's extended one; and shivered at the touch, so cold, so unresponsive. That was all. The next moment, Miss Abigail let Chérie's hand drop, and turned away abruptly; without saying a word to welcome the orphaned girl to her home.

Nell watched her walk down the hall to the staircase, and then turned to Chérie. "Don't mind her," she soothed, taking her cousin's hands in hers, "she's probably had a run-in with Sarah, or Aunt Eliza, and just vented the wrath left over on you. Oh, I know! We often clash. She gets over it and so do I."

Chérie blinked back the tears, and followed Nell into the hall, waiting until she closed the door. Perhaps Nell was right. Sometimes persons with uneven

tempers were like that. She had heard Nanette say that her husband Jacques abused her one day and was heartbroken the next until she would forgive him. Maybe Aunt Abigail would be like Jacques and be pleasant to her every other day.

CHAPTER IV

Chérie's First Thanksgiving Day

TWO days passed, two days of incessant rain. Instead of the snow that usually came for Thanksgiving, this downpour had ushered in the holiday, keeping all within doors. Sudden gusts of wind splashed the drops with wicked force against the windows in the living room. But here a bright wood fire blazed on the hearth, roaring up the chimney now and again as the fitful draught increased; making shadows dance about the walls, reflecting the flames as they flew upward.

Chérie and Nell sat close together on the couch. For these two days they had seized every opportunity to exchange confidences. They had acquainted each other with all their likes and dislikes. It seemed to them, at that moment, that they had always been friends, so familiar was each with the tastes and aspirations of the other.

In a huge rocker at one side of the fireplace was Miss Eliza, indulging in her usual forty winks, her bright satin gown shimmering like gold in the firelight; while at the farthest window, in a high-backed chair, sat Miss Abigail reading. Evidently she was very much interested in her book, for only occasionally she glanced up and out at the falling rain. Unlike her sister, she wore garments of somber hue, in which she looked as stiff and as uncompromising as the starched linen collar peeping above the high neckband that encircled her gaunt throat.

There were no guests. The Thanksgiving dinner in the Greenwood home had always been for members of the family exclusively but preparations were just as elaborate as if the most honored in the land were expected. All the preceding day savory odors, emanating from the kitchen pervaded the whole house; and now Sarah was grimly battling with the kitchen range, anxious to have the meal on time, eager to prove that her hand had lost none of its cunning in the passing years.

Sarah wanted no help. She resented it. She would grumble at the amount of work she had to do, and then by every means in her power try to oust any one hired to lighten her duties. That very morning, Nell and Chérie had offered to set the table for her, and while she voiced no objection to their proposal, she made it impossible for them to carry out their intentions. She followed them as they placed the glasses; changing them immediately to different positions, and it was the same with anything and everything they touched, making it so evident that their assistance was worthless that the girls finally withdrew. Then Sarah went back to her kitchen, pleased to be rid of them.

"She doesn't want our perfectly good help," Nell had whispered to Chérie; "that's why she is so tantalizing. We're about as popular here as mad dogs. Let her set the table herself."

And Chérie, nothing loath, dropped the spoons from her hand, and unceremoniously followed Nell from the dining room.

That was hours ago. Since this they had basked in comfort on the couch before the fire. It was a quarter after two by Nell's tiny wrist watch. What had happened to Sarah and the Thanksgiving dinner? She

showed the time to Chérie with much pantomime, from which Chérie gathered that her cousin was almost dying from starvation. Aunt Abigail had closed her book with a slap, and was watching the door while her sister was arranging the folds of her gown in preparation for the grand march into the dining room across the hall.

And at that moment, the door was thrown open and Sarah stood in the doorway. Sarah, red and perspiring, her hastily-donned black silk dress and white frilled apron slightly twisted, and her cap awry on her coarse gray hair. "Dinner is ready," she announced, with a challenging stare. After all were seated, however, Sarah stood waiting for the customary praise from Miss Abigail's lips. Sarah craved praise, but she wanted no one to share it with her. She stood alone, asking for all honor due.

Miss Abigail glanced up and saw her. She remembered this peculiarity in the woman, and at once complimented her on the appearance of the table. Satisfied, Sarah went out to bring in the first course.

And what a dinner it was! And how Chérie enjoyed it! As for Nell, she was hilarious; laughing and joking; outrivaling Aunt Eliza with her chatter; compelling Aunt Abigail, even, to smile at her quips.

"I must tell you a funny thing that happened to a school friend of mine," related Nell, glancing about the table. "Last Thanksgiving while I was here she went to a play on Broadway. It was called a mystery play, and through the three acts poor Laura was almost in hysterics. The murders and attempted murders, by choking and shooting, portrayed on the stage, made her almost helpless with fear. Nor was she the only one in that condition. Some were worse, others even fainted."

"Such plays shouldn't be allowed by the authorities," disapproved Miss Abigail; "there are enough real horrors without making believe."

"To make a long story short, Laura lived in a suburban town, and that night her mother asked her to run down into the cellar and open the furnace draughts. Without a thought and without turning on the light, she flew down the steps, but as she reached the center of the cellar, long, thin fingers were wound about her throat. The mother above was terrified by the agonized screams from below. What had happened to her daughter? Down she rushed, turning on the light as she passed; and there was the girl almost in a state of collapse, with the long roots of a monster plant, which had been hung from a beam to dry, twined about her neck. Well, she told me—but she begged me not to say anything about it to the other girls. She knew if they heard of it they would tease her forever about her cowardice. But no more mystery plays for her."

"I should think not," commented Miss Abigail, emphatically.

"But every one goes to a thing like that, just to see what it's about," laughed Nell. "I'd go to-day, if I could, wouldn't you, Chérie?"

"Yes," agreed Chérie, smiling; "I think so."

Miss Abigail cast a disdainful glance in her direction and then turned to Nell. "Why do you call her that, when you know we wish her to be called Mehitable?" she demanded, impatiently.

"I couldn't call her anything but Chérie, Aunt Abigail," said Nell; "so you'll have to put up with it while I'm here. . . . I'm sorry, but really I couldn't."

"Why not say what you mean—that you won't

call her anything else!'' scoffed Aunt Abigail, as she rang for Sarah to remove the plates. Sarah had certainly proved herself a jewel to-day. She hoped things would go off as well next week, when the minister and his wife came to dinner. After all, it paid to put up with the woman's cranky temper, for they would never find another like her. She hadn't a thought beyond the work required of her in this house. It was the alpha and omega of all things, as far as she was concerned.

And so dinner went on until the dessert was brought in, and Nell noticed that Chérie was refusing the mince pie. That would never do! She must sample everything!

''You must take it,'' she told Chérie, ''that's how you show your gratitude for our country's prosperity.''

''But it is too much,'' protested Chérie, as Sarah placed it before her.

''Nonsense!'' retorted Nell. ''It's the best way I know to give thanks. Don't you think so yourself, Chérie?''

''Not . . . not the best, Nell,'' ventured Chérie, timidly, after a little hesitation; her dark eyes shining, a bright color stealing into her cheeks.

Nell stared at her in surprise. Chérie wasn't so milk-and-water, after all! ''No?'' she drawled, with a resigned upturning of her eyes; ''then perhaps you'll tell us the best way, little cousin?''

''I think,'' returned Chérie, promptly, ''the best way is to thank the good God in prayer.''

Nell reddened. She felt ashamed that Chérie had to remind her of her duty to God. Miss Abigail frowned, and Miss Eliza stopped in the middle of a

sentence; leaving one of her admirers in a precarious situation.

Complete silence reigned. Chérie felt her heart quicken. Why were they so quiet? She glanced at Nell. Nell's cheeks were ablaze, but she smiled at her.

"You made me feel mighty small for a minute, Chérie," she admitted. She was always generous enough to acknowledge herself in the wrong, if so convinced. "I hope you don't think we're a lot of heathens. We're not, really, you know, but we say things without thinking. Now we are all church members, and Aunt Abigail is a pillar of that frame church I showed you the other day, aren't you, Aunt?"

Miss Abigail nodded, but she looked annoyed. She wished Nell would be quiet, and not give the girl false notions of her importance.

"Are you a member of any church, Mehitable?" she inquired, in a lofty manner, and there was a hint of something disagreeable in her voice. She was sure that she was not. Fred would never join the church despite wheedling and threats. How could the daughter he had raised be any different?

"Yes, Aunt Abigail," answered Chérie. She was pleased that her aunt evinced even this much interest in her; heretofore, she had ignored her completely. Perhaps she intended to be more friendly. She hoped so. It would be so lonesome without Nell—dear Nell!

"You are a church member?" Miss Abigail was plainly surprised. To be a member of a church meant Episcopalian, of course. Now, she didn't altogether like the Episcopalians. Sometimes they aped Catholicity. A vague fear entered her mind on the instant. "What church?" she demanded, sharply, her cold eyes on Chérie.

"The Catholic Church," answered Chérie, simply.

Miss Abigail gasped, then laughed to hide her nervousness; hoping against hope there was some mistake. "Oh, of course," she said. "All go to the Catholic churches in Paris to see them. That's part of the European trip—to do the churches. That they are attractive goes without saying. But you are not a Catholic?"

"Why, surely, I am a Catholic!" declared Chérie, surprised at her aunt's persistence in the matter.

"But you can't be!" cried Miss Abigail in evident dismay, clasping her hands together and pressing them against her chest; at the same time allowing her chin to rest upon them. What would she do? What could she say to the minister . . . to her friends?

"But I am," retorted Chérie, "and so was my mother."

"Just like that!" thought Nell. "Good night! Mr. Puss is out of bag now, head, heels, tail and all!"

Miss Abigail sat up with a jerk. How dared this miserable girl fling this thing in her face? How dared she drop in out of nowhere and upset a household in this manner? She must put a stop to it, at once! One Church was as good as another! Think of allowing a foreigner to spoil the work of a lifetime in a community like this.

"Well," she sneered, "you'd better forget all that! Here you will go to church with me. Do you understand?"

Chérie could not fail to understand. For this was an ultimatum, delivered in the iciest of tones. Neither could Nell. Both girls stared at Miss Abigail in amazement.

"Gee whiz!" exploded Nell, at last. "What's wrong

with Chérie's church? Aren't we all trying to make the grade to heaven?''

''Not so loud, Eleanor!'' chided Miss Abigail. ''I have said nothing against any one's church. I am thinking of myself. I have myself to consider. Even my best friends would criticize me if they found out that the girl I had taken into my home was not of our fold.''

''Much we need care about them,'' came impatiently from Nell, a mutinous expression about her red lips, as she leaned over to take one of Chérie's hands in hers. ''You have nothing in common with those old frizzles anyway, have you, Chérie? You don't care if they won't let you slide down their cellar doors or play with their tin dishes. . . . I know I wouldn't.''

Chérie shot her cousin a glance of gratitude. She didn't understand these allusions to cellar doors and tin dishes, but she knew that Nell was her friend, stanchly taking her part even at the risk of offending Aunt Abigail. And Aunt Abigail was more than offended, she was furious.

''I'll thank you to mind your own business, Eleanor,'' she stormed, ''and to keep your criticisms to yourself. Where my friends are concerned, I want none of your interference . . . nor your insolence.''

Nell bit her lips to keep back a defiant answer. What was the use? It would only prolong the quarrel, and make things that much harder for her poor, friendless little cousin. What was to be the end of this? Chérie would never get on with Aunt Abigail now, unless she gave in to her, and in some way she felt sure that Chérie would stick to her religion as long as she lived. There it was in a nutshell.

She felt sorry for Chérie. Aunt Abigail had the

whip hand! Chérie was dependent upon her for a home, for the very food required to keep her body and soul together. It was too bad. She wished she could help in some way. But what could she do? Monday she would leave for home and then Chérie would be alone. If Aunt Eliza weren't so silly things might be different. Poor Aunt Eliza! naturally kind but with her clouded mind always dwelling on the past!

Just now Miss Eliza's mind was very much in the present. What was all this fuss about, anyway? Why was Abigail riding her high horse? What was she saying to poor Fred's little girl? Abigail was always like that—forever finding a crow to pick with some one. She knew her. How she kept glaring at the two girls—ready to jump down the throat of the first one that opened her mouth! Alas! It was safer to keep quiet when Abigail was on the rampage. Miss Eliza had found that out for herself years ago. No one could ever get the best of Abigail!

And thus ended the Thanksgiving dinner that was supposed to stand for so much, spoiled by bitter words and bitter thoughts! Each one thanklessly arose, and left the dining room to Sarah's grumbling and the clatter of china and silver.

CHAPTER V

Chérie and Nell Walk to Woodhurst

IT WAS one day later, and Thanksgiving was a thing of the past. The rain had given place to sunshine which was just now flooding the dining room where both girls were at luncheon with Miss Eliza. Since yesterday Miss Abigail had held herself aloof from them, and Sarah had just reported that Miss Greenwood was still suffering from a severe headache and would not be down.

Nell glanced at Chérie. "Poor kid," she thought, "she'll have a little peace for a while."

Just then a heavy sigh came from Miss Eliza. Both girls looked at her, wondering whether she was disappointed or relieved. Could it be possible that she, too, was glad to be free from the dominant Abigail's espionage and criticism? Never before had Aunt Eliza appealed to them as a martyr to her sister's whims, but now the story Nell had told Chérie came into their minds—the story of Abigail's interference with her sister's love affairs, and Eliza's subsequent illness. And they felt pity for the garrulous little woman who was treated with such contempt, who was a nonentity in her own house! And it was as much her house as it was her sister's. Nell knew this, because her father had told her that the Greenwood girls had share and share alike in the estate. Yet Abigail had always posed as the head of the house. None of her sisters had ever objected.

"And as I was saying, when Sarah interrupted

me,'' came Miss Eliza's high-pitched voice, breaking in upon their thoughts, ''he brought me the most beautiful bunch of roses, all done up in tissue paper.''

Nell listened. Any other time she had only pretended to listen to what she considered the wild fancies of a weakened brain, and Miss Eliza was sharp enough to notice the difference, for Nell was not much of a dissembler. Miss Eliza, realizing now that she had an audience of two instead of one, waxed eloquent. Chérie had always been too polite to ignore her at any time.

''They were wonderful,'' she continued, ''such long stems. Some were red, some pink, and some——''

''The stems, Aunt?'' broke in Nell, her dimples showing in her cheeks.

''The what, Eleanor?'' asked Miss Eliza, bewildered, ''what was it you said?''

''Why, you said the stems were red and pink—that's all.''

''Did I, Eleanor? That's funny isn't it? I mean the roses were red, and pink, and yellow. Never take yellow roses, girls—they stand for jealousy. He was jealous.''

''How did you find out he was jealous?'' inquired Nell, curiously.

''It was Abigail who found it out and warned me in time,'' she replied. ''She didn't like his eyebrows. They almost met over his nose, you know. Indeed, they were quite noticeable!''

''But that means nothing,'' Nell said impatiently. ''He might have been perfectly all right.''

''Maybe he was, Eleanor,'' acquiesced Miss Eliza, ''but Abigail didn't like him, and she wouldn't speak to me. . . . It was dreadful. So I told him not to come again to the house . . . and he never did.''

"But he wasn't coming to see her!" cried Nell, indignantly. "What a nerve she had! Cast-iron, I'll say!"

"Sh—sh," cautioned Aunt Eliza, nervously glancing about, "she'll hear you, and she'll be so angry with me."

Chérie touched her lips with her finger and shook her head at Nell. If she persisted she would get Aunt Eliza into trouble.

Nell glared. "Of course, you are one of the meek ones, too, Chérie," she told her, angrily, "and she'll sacrifice you to suit herself. But don't think I'm angry at you, little cousin," as Chérie, surprised at the outburst, shrank back; "I'm only angry for you . . . that's all. So forgive me, and let us go for a walk."

Chérie was delighted. "Oh, Nell," she agreed, "that will be great, as you say," and she jumped up to follow her cousin from the room. At the door, she stopped. In her eagerness to be off, she had forgotten her aunt. Apologetically, she turned, but Miss Eliza was already on her way to the big chair in the bay window, with but one idea in her mind, to the exclusion of her nieces and everything else about her.

"We are going in a different direction to-day," Nell told Chérie, "and this will bring us to the cutest little town you ever saw . . . the town of Woodhurst. It isn't a bit like Oldville. It's all bustle and up-to-date. The Oldville residents pretend to despise it and call it a mill town, because the people work in mills. But they are jealous, for the folks here have money and they spend it. Wait until you see their churches and schools."

"How do you know so much about all these places, Nell?" asked Chérie, as they sauntered on.

"When Dad is here we go everywhere. I guess there isn't anything within a radius of twenty miles that I haven't seen."

They were now well out of the town.

Sidewalks had disappeared, and they were obliged to walk along one side of the road, which stretched ahead of them like a gray ribbon. Chérie timidly kept to the outer edge, but there was no danger. The traffic was light, and it was only now and again that they were required to make way for a passing car or truck. A few of the drivers offered to take the girls to their destination, but each time Nell pressed Chérie's arm with her tense little fingers and refused, warning her cousin, at the same time, against taking such a risk.

"You must never get in a car driven by a stranger, Chérie," said Nell, "whether the stranger happens to be a man or a woman. . . . I made that promise to Dad and Mother ages ago . . . and I've kept it."

"It is good to keep a promise," murmured Chérie, gazing approvingly at her cousin.

"Surely," agreed Nell, "and we should be thankful for the advice of those who love us. Some girls are heedless, and others think their parents know nothing. A girl in my section room, who, by the way, is one of the heedless sort, had an experience that will remain with her through life. It was raining when she left our school building, and she had neither raincoat nor umbrella. She looked about and saw a handsome car draw up to the curb and stop. The driver asked her in a pleasant voice to get in, saying he would take her home. The girl thoughtlessly stepped into the automobile, and gave him her street and number. She sank down into the cushioned seat, and thought how much better this was than trudging home

in all that rain. Rapidly the car sped along until they neared the street on which she lived. She glanced toward him, expecting him to slow down. But he didn't. He went on, and with a burst of speed that seemed to take the car from under her, he was soon blocks beyond. Terrified, she called to him, but he paid no attention to her. She sprang to her feet and pounded on his back with both hands, but he never even turned to look. Just at that moment the traffic going that way was held up. In a flash she saw her chance of escape and took advantage of it. She says she can never forget it, nor the way he scowled at her when she banged the door of the car after her. But she didn't care then. She was safe."

Chérie breathed a sigh of relief. "Oh, I'm glad . . . I had such fear for her. I thought the car would never stop."

Nell laughed. "Well, it did, Chérie," she said.

Farms now lay on each side of the road, with here and there groups of cattle sunning themselves. It was a beautiful day, an unusual day for this time of the year. It seemed more like a day in spring, the sun was so bright and the sky so blue, and even the wind played warm against their faces, glowing now with nature's rouge on lips and cheeks.

"How pretty it is!" remarked Nell, her eyes glancing from one spot to another. "Pretty enough to paint, I'll say!"

Chérie nodded, and a dreamy expression stole into her large dark eyes. Thoughts of her dear father came to her. She could see again the pictures he had painted of just such scenes, and the big unfinished canvas always turned to the wall, the dream of his life that had never come true.

"Of what are you thinking, little cousin?" asked

Nell, conscious that Chérie's thoughts were miles and miles away.

"Of my father," she answered, coming back to the present and her surroundings with a start, "and his little potboilers that he used to paint. That is what he called the small pictures he sold that we could have money to live. He would take me with him into the country, such as this, to get sketches; and what wonderful tales we had to tell my dear little mother when we returned. Oh, we were so happy, Nell, and we laughed at everything . . . at nothing." And she turned away with tear-dimmed eyes, hoping that her cousin hadn't noticed her sorrow.

Nell gazed thoughtfully at the girl beside her, and yesterday's scene at dinner flashed across her mind. Purposely, she had made no reference to the disagreeable occurrence. She would like to efface it from Chérie's memory, but she knew that was impossible. Pity surged up within her for this poor little half-foreign, orphaned cousin of hers, alone among strangers who were critical and prejudiced. How would she, gently reared, loved and petted, weather the coldness, contempt, and evident dislike of Abigail Greenwood? As a flower transplanted to a colder clime would succumb to the touch of frost, so would she. Nell sighed. What could be done to save her? She didn't know. The problem was too much for her. It would take older and wiser heads to solve it. There was only one thing now, and that was to interest her own good parents in Chérie's welfare. Perhaps they would think of some way to help. All she could do, was to make things a little more pleasant for Chérie, while here. But the time was so short, only until Monday morning!

"Oh, Nell, Nell!" suddenly cried Chérie, pointing

upwards, in a flutter of excitement, her uplifted eyes shining, her lips parted.

Nell looked up, startled. "What's the uproar about?" she asked, and then stood silent, watching Chérie.

"It is a church, Nell . . . don't you see?" she faltered, her gaze fastened on the spire, topped by the symbol of Christianity, rising above the leafless trees, the cross glistening like gold against the blue of the cloudless sky. "It's my church!"

"Of course, I see," answered Nell, smiling. "That's why we came here this afternoon. This is the nearest Catholic church, and Aunt Abigail is sure that you'll not hear of it before Sunday. Oh, I can read her like a book, wise as she is, so I thought it was time for little Nell to take a hand in the game."

Slowly Chérie's eyes left the burnished cross, and turned on her cousin in amazement. "And you brought me here for this? Oh, Nell," with a half-suppressed sob, "how good you are!"

Nell looked away to hide the tears in her eyes. "Nonsense!" she muttered, blinking rapidly to shake the telltale moisture from her lashes. "This is a free country, Chérie. Don't you let Aunt Abigail cow you with any of her bunk!"

"Cow . . . bunk?" repeated Chérie; "what is it, Nell?"

"Slang, as usual," laughed Nell, "but I can't help it. Nothing fits like slang where Aunt Abigail is concerned. Come, Chérie, we are almost there . . . just around this bend in the road is Woodhurst."

"Oh, it is charming, as you said, Nell," Chérie told her cousin as the pretty little town spread itself out before them.

"This leads to the church," remarked Nell as they

came to what appeared to be the main thoroughfare of the place.

It was only a few minutes past two, and there were not many pedestrians about. The church was at the extreme end of this street, and the girls had to pass through the business section of the town to reach it. All the stores had large plate windows, attractively dressed, and there seemed to be a gala air everywhere. Three musicians in fancy uniforms stood on the curb as they passed, playing one of the latest jazz airs. And Chérie was conscious of a strange feeling of elation. All at once she seemed to be somebody else. The depression she had been under since her father's death suddenly left her. She felt light, as light as air.

"Chérie, Chérie, I love you!" sang Nell in her ear, with the band acting as accompanist.

"Of course," murmured Chérie, turning to look at her, surprised to hear her proclaim that fact aloud.

Nell actually chuckled. "At times, Chérie, you're delicious," she said. "That's one of the song hits. Listen!" as the trio on the curb sang the chorus in unison.

Chérie listened, smiling as the pleasant voices reached her, and then laughed. It was funny now that she understood.

And so they walked along happily until they came to the church.

"I shall go in for just a minute, Nell . . . and you can wait for me."

"Nothing doing," retorted Nell, a little offended. "I intend to go, too. Do you think, after dragging my weary way here for your benefit that I'm going to stand outside like an—an outcast?"

"Oh, no, dear Nell, but I did not think——" fal-

tered Chérie, "I did not think that you cared——" blushing in her embarrassment.

"Is that so? Well, now, you're wiser. So lead the way, little cousin, and I'll follow."

Inside it seemed dark after the sunlight without, and the sanctuary lamp gleamed like a ruby against the shadowy background. Nell pressed Chérie's arm as she left her, and slipped into the last pew to wait. Chérie walked up the aisle, the colored bars of light cast by the sun as it shone through the stained glass of the windows touching her as she passed, glorifying her.

Nell's eyes followed the slim, black-clad figure to the altar-rail. She muttered rather fiercely to herself, "This is just where Miss Abigail Greenwood gets off . . . right here!"

CHAPTER VI

Chérie and Nell Meet with Adventure

"HURRY, Chérie! This is Boston!" called Nell, as she helped Miss Eliza to her feet. The car had not come to a stop, but it took Aunt Eliza some time to steady herself on her high-heeled shoes.

Chérie smiled and nodded in answer to Nell's call; and followed them as Nell piloted her aunt to the platform of the gayly painted trolley. It was no easy task to get Miss Eliza's unwieldy bulk down the steps, and the conductor had to be called upon. Finally, with his help and the help of a policeman standing near, the feat was accomplished, much to the relief of the girls. From the trolley to the street was only a step, and they soon found themselves facing the entrance of a large department store.

"I'm not going in there, Eleanor; I'm not used to it," complained Miss Eliza, tugging at Nell's sleeve to go in the opposite direction. "I want to go where I am known . . . where I've always shopped."

"Why, Aunt Eliza, you were with me, in this very store, last August when you bought your purple hat. . . . Don't you remember?"

Miss Eliza didn't remember anything about the store, but she did remember the hat. "Well, well, is that so? And I did like that hat, it was so becoming to me. . . . If you're sure about the place, Eleanor, we'll go in."

"Why, certainly, I'm sure! Where is Chérie?" she asked, looking about, until she spied her cousin be-

hind a mammoth woman who had succeeded in wedging herself between them. "Oh, there you are! Keep your eyes on us, or you'll get lost in the crowd," she cautioned, as Chérie managed, by much wriggling, to reach her relatives.

Then Chérie felt herself carried along, and became a little panic-stricken, grasping a handful of Nell's coat, trying desperately to stem the movement.

Within the spacious building, however, the congestion was hardly noticeable, the crowd scattering through the aisles, leaving our small party gazing at a collection of glittering articles on the novelty tables with seemingly but few about them. From aisle to aisle they went, finding each more attractive than the other. Nell was in the seventh heaven of delight. "Oh, boy," she whispered to Chérie, "home was never like this! I love to shop! Don't you?"

"Eleanor," entreated Miss Eliza, puffing away beside them, "I'm so tired . . . come and get my hat."

"In a minute, Aunt Eliza," promised Nell. "Look, Chérie, at that band for the hair! Isn't it scrumptious? I'd feel like a movie queen in that."

"Eleanor," gasped her aunt, "if you don't come, I'll faint, I——"

"Oh, I'll go with you," interrupted Nell, her eyes on a beautiful bracelet. "That's a slave bracelet, Chérie. Isn't it ritzy?"

"Yes, Nell," gazing anxiously at Aunt Eliza: "but we must leave all this. Aunt Eliza is tired."

Nell turned to her aunt, conscience-stricken. "That's too bad . . . I didn't think! We'll take the elevator at once."

The millinery department was on the third floor, and Aunt Eliza found a ready listener in the clerk who waited on her. She had missed her afternoon nap,

and was unusually garrulous in consequence. So she talked all the time she was trying on the hats produced for her inspection. Finally one was decided on that suited her nieces as well as herself. A worthy successor to her beloved purple.

"Where shall I send it, madame?" inquired the girl, as she made out the check and took the bill from Miss Eliza.

"I'll take it with me," returned Miss Eliza, "I need it for church to-morrow. The one I have been wearing is really a disgrace, and this one I have on——"

"Wouldn't you like a cup of nice hot tea, Aunt Eliza?" interrupted Nell, resenting the amused smile about the young clerk's lips. After all, Aunt Eliza was her aunt, and she didn't want to see any one laughing at her oddities! "The tea room is on this floor, isn't it?" she said haughtily to the girl, who had just given her the cardboard box containing the hat.

"Yes, miss," she answered; "walk straight ahead," pointing, "to the last aisle and you'll find it."

"Now where are you two going?" asked Miss Eliza, as she sank down on a chair at one of the small tables in the Japanese tea room, fussily removing her wraps and folding together her gloves. "Can't you have a cup of tea here with me?"

Nell glanced at Chérie before answering, her eyes twinkling. "No, aunt, we are bound to have ice cream or die in the attempt. You can't imagine how gorgeous the sundaes looked as we passed . . . they were simply splendiferous. So Chérie and I are going down to the main floor to treat ourselves."

Aunt Eliza gazed at the girls benignly. She used to like ices and cream sodas not so very long ago.

"I'll wait here for you," she told them, "but don't be so long. Abigail will be on her high horse if we are late getting back."

"You know, Chérie," said Nell, on their way down, "Aunt Eliza doesn't need that hat any more than a rabbit."

Chérie looked her surprise. "Then why did she shop?" she asked.

"Because I wanted you to have the trip," returned Nell, "that's why!"

"But I can't follow you, Nell!" Chérie was puzzled. What was Nell saying? Was it one of her jokes?

"No, I suppose not, Chérie. You would be more than wonderful if you did," laughed Nell. "So I'll tell you how I induced her to take the trip. Simply by suggestion!"

Chérie's eyes opened wider. She wished she could understand Nell. She didn't want her cousin to think she was hopelessly dull, so she murmured something in French and nodded her head as she listened to Nell quote the following: "For ways that are dark, and for tricks that are vain, the heathen Chinee is peculiar, etc."

"Now I'll tell you, Chérie, how I did the trick," she continued; "just by hinting that her hat was out of date—old-fashioned. I told her of one I had seen in New York that would suit her style and beauty, and I went into ecstasies about it. That was enough. She must have a new hat at once. Of course that meant a trip into Boston, and I made it very clear to her that I wouldn't go one step without you."

Chérie understood now thoroughly, and her brows puckered a little, as she questioned, dubiously: "Was it right, Nell, to pretend that way?"

A look of surprise clouded Nell's blue eyes a mo-

ment. Then she laughed. "Don't be a goose, Chérie! Aunt Eliza enjoys this trip more than we do, especially without Aunt Abigail tagging after her, blocking her in everything she tries to do. No, little cousin, it's perfectly all right, so don't let your tender conscience interfere with your enjoyment."

And just then they saw the immense soda fountain, a marvel of marble and silver, and as Nell rushed to the booth to purchase the checks, she said, "Chérie, get a couple of places for us at one of the tables. I'll order the sundaes at the counter. You know they'll make them up while I wait, and I'll bring them over."

Chérie glanced about, searchingly, and at last spied a small table which had just been deserted by a party of women. Quickly she threaded her way among the occupied tables, and took possession of it.

At another table quite close to Chérie, a young woman was seated, with an ice-cream soda frothed high above the glass in front of her. She was toying with a couple of straws, held carelessly in her hands, while her eyes roved from one group to another, taking in all about her. She was dressed in the extreme of fashion, and a costly fur coat draped the back of her chair. Her cheeks were so pink and her lips so red that Chérie found herself staring hard at this very attractive person. She realized this with a start and turned away her head; but not before she noticed a long double string of pearls about her neighbor's throat, falling down the front of the blue silk dress.

She wondered how long it would be before Nell would come? She didn't care to be here alone. All at once the place seemed unbearably warm and she stood up to remove her coat. As she did so, her eyes caught the gleam of a little heap of white beads at her feet.

She stooped and picked from the floor a single string of large pearls. Amazed, she looked at them, holding them between her fingers. Why didn't Nell come? What would she say when she saw these? She glanced toward the soda fountain, and saw her cousin at last, carrying a cherry and cream-topped sundae in each hand.

And just at that moment, she felt a sudden, strong tug at the pearls. Instinctively she wrenched them free and held them to her chest.

"They are mine!" came a voice in her ear, harsh with excitement. "They dropped from my neck, I tell you. . . . Give them to me!"

Chérie turned her head and gazed into a woman's angry eyes. At once she saw it was the young woman with the painted lips who had been seated at the near-by table—the young woman in the blue silk dress with the long double string of pearls. But now her pearls were missing, and she was claiming these.

"They are not yours," declared Chérie, with conviction, as Nell joined them. "I know they are not."

"What's the matter, Chérie?" asked Nell, hurriedly placing the two silver dishes on the table. "What's she saying to you?"

"They are mine," cried the young woman, angrily. "Give them to me, at once, or I'll have you arrested."

"What is she talking about?" demanded Nell, seeing with dismay that they were fast becoming the center of attraction of all within earshot. Some were even leaving their tables and crowding in around them.

"She says these pearls are hers," answered Chérie, showing her cousin the beautiful shining string, "and they are not. She is not telling the truth. They are

not her pearls. She has her own long string of beads in her bag. She took them off, to claim these."

Nell stood in mute astonishment, staring at Chérie. Was this her timid little cousin? This decided young person, defiantly standing her ground? This girl with head held high and contempt in her clear, ringing tones? But Chérie it was, and Nell's place was there beside her.

"What do you intend to do with them?" asked a man, stepping forward to Chérie's side.

"I shall give them to somebody to find the owner, sir," responded Chérie, simply.

"That's the way to talk, young lady," approved the man; and then with a sharp glance at the claimant, who was hurriedly putting on her fur coat, he continued, "Madame, if you wish to make your claim, come with us to the office on the second floor."

But the woman tossed her head, and mumbling made her way through the crowd and was soon lost to view. The man laughed and winked at the people about him. "Discretion is that lady's best card just now," he remarked, as he led the two girls to the elevator.

Chérie grasped Nell's arm. All of a sudden, she felt weak. Suppose she had made a mistake? The argument she had put forward seemed silly. The woman could have more than one string if she wished. But as Chérie weakened, Nell strengthened, and she pressed Chérie's hand reassuringly with hers. They must see this thing through, no matter how long it took, hoping against hope that Aunt Eliza would stay in the tea room until they were free to go to her.

As the little party entered the manager's private office, they saw a lady seated at his desk near him.

Both seemed deeply engrossed in conversation, but the click of the closing door made them look up.

"Well, Gray," said the manager, "you are the very man I want. I was about to send for you. This lady has lost a string of pearls in the store, somewhere. Mrs. Wolfson, this is one of our detectives, and he will do his best in the matter."

"That's pretty fast work, Mr. Elliot, isn't it?" chuckled Gray. "This young lady found a string of pearls a few minutes ago, and has brought it here to hand over to you."

Mrs. Wolfson sprang to her feet, joyfully clasping her hands together as Chérie, red and white by turns, held out the necklace. "Oh, my dear girl, where did you find it?" she asked eagerly.

"In the ice cream salon . . . they were at my feet," answered Chérie, placing the pearls in Mrs. Wolfson's hands.

"And there is my monogram on the clasp," Mrs. Wolfson was saying as Chérie turned to go, followed by Nell. "But where are you going?" she called to them in surprise. "You have returned something worth thousands of dollars and are running away without even my thank you? That isn't fair, you know. There's a reward coming to you and you will have to accept it."

"Wait a minute, young lady," said the manager, "and we'll fix this thing up."

So Chérie and Nell were ushered back by the detective, while Mrs. Wolfson and the manager retired to the far end of the room. Presently they called Mr. Gray into the consultation, and the girls heard him telling how Chérie refused to give up the pearls to the other claimant, declaring they were not hers and that she was not the owner.

"What is your name?" inquired Mrs. Wolfson going to Chérie, and placing her hand on the girl's slim shoulder with a caressing touch.

"Chérie Lawson," answered Chérie, "and this is my cousin, Nell Brooks"; and Mrs. Wolfson smiled and bowed to Nell, acknowledging the introduction with the fine tact of which she was mistress—the tact, added to her wealth, by which she held the best society, in and around Boston, in the hollow of her hand. Her name in the highest circles was a name to conjure with, but to Chérie and Nell it meant nothing. As for appearance, she might have been anybody, while some anybodies would have been apt to turn up their noses at the plain costume which this white-haired, sweet-faced woman always wore when shopping. It was no wonder that the cousins stared with amazement at the five-hundred-dollar check she left fluttering in Chérie's hand.

"But I cannot accept this," faltered Chérie, "it is too much for so little. I did nothing . . . the pearls were yours. . . ."

"Nonsense, child," retorted Mrs. Wolfson, kissing her impulsively, "and I want your address. I am not going to lose sight of you if I can help it." And for a few minutes she was busy writing in a tiny leather-covered book this information given by Chérie, with Nell's help.

Presently, they were on the elevator going up after Aunt Eliza, the check tucked away in Chérie's bag.

"Gee whiz," cried Nell, in disgust, "we never got our sundaes, after all! Isn't that the cat's meow?"

"But it doesn't really matter, does it?" laughed Chérie, amused by the look of dismay on Nell's face. What did a sundae more or less matter? What could compare with this wonderful adventure?

CHAPTER VII

Lost in the Fog

CHÉRIE awakened with a start, and for a moment or two did not know where she was. The room was still dark, although a grayish streak of daylight showed between the lowered curtain and the window sill. She raised herself and rested on her elbow, and, in that second, remembered. It was Sunday, and the journey to church loomed large before her! She sprang from the bed and ran to the window, raising the shade and looking out through the small leaded panes. What time was it? She couldn't tell! There had been a decided change in the weather during the night, and all without was enveloped in fog, making it impossible to judge the hour. But as she stood, seven sonorous strokes came to her from the tall clock in the lower hall.

"Seven!" she counted, as the last stroke died away. "I shall have time . . . but I must hurry to reach there before eight-thirty."

Nell had showed her the schedule on the blackboard outside the church, and she had treasured the time in her mind. Nell had also advised that she go early, as her absence then would not be noticed. On Sunday morning, the usual routine was interfered with by the preparations indulged in by the Misses Greenwood. They wished to attend church as befitted their station in life. Chérie was not deceitful and she didn't relish this underhand way of accomplishing her purpose, but she dreaded a scene with Aunt

Abigail. What good would it do? Neither would give in! Of course, it was bound to come later; but, at least, she would have the satisfaction of knowing that she had fulfilled her duty to God for this day.

Last night Aunt Abigail had asked her if she cared to attend church in the morning, and she had answered in the affirmative. To be sure, she had made a mental reservation at the time, understanding thoroughly to which church her aunt alluded, and to which church she meant to go.

But she was sorry for her seeming acquiescence when she saw the expression of satisfaction that spread over Aunt Abigail's sharp-featured face. To Aunt Abigail Greenwood this assent had seemed like victory, and victory was life to her. Her dominant nature brooked no obstacles, were they little or big; and Chérie's adherence to her own church had nettled her. Besides, she felt that she would have been freely criticized by the whole congregation if she had allowed this girl to go to any other church than the one which the Greenwoods had supported since its erection, generations ago. And she would have been so humiliated! She could never stand that! At her time of life, too! She who had always held her head so high, among them all! She, who had so mercilessly criticized others on the least deflection from duty! What could she expect in return?

Aunt Abigail had been worried by these thoughts since the tilt between the girls and herself at the dinner table on Thanksgiving Day. It was only as she was going to the guild meeting on Saturday morning, that she had decided to use gentler means to win her niece away from her silly ideas about religion. On her way home she called on the principal of the school, and told him about her niece Mehitable. He

had been a schoolmate of Fred Lawson's, and was interested at once in his daughter, promising to place her according to her merit on Monday.

And after Miss Eliza and the girls returned from Boston, she told Chérie, very pleasantly, that Mr. Black would expect her to report at the school Monday morning.

"So you'll have no further trouble," she finished, smiling.

Chérie knew nothing of the inner working of her aunt's active brain, and was surprised at her graciousness. Nell nudged her cousin, also wondering at Aunt Abigail's sudden change of front. And she, as well as Chérie, had doubts as to the genuineness of her present attitude toward one for whom she had so lately evinced dislike.

To Chérie, her antagonism was but thinly veiled by this show of friendliness; the girl felt that the least resistance on her part would bring to the surface the cold contempt that had been dealt out to her since her arrival under this roof. Nell had read the distrust in her glance. Nell understood the brave spirit girding itself for the coming conflict. Nell knew that she was dauntless where her religion was concerned. And Nell said nothing, but slipped her arm around Chérie's shoulders protectingly, and smiled into the troubled dark eyes.

Thoughts of Nell filled Chérie's mind now as she dressed. What would she do after Nell went home? How could she endure this place without her? She opened her bag and glanced at the neatly folded check. The secret of yesterday's adventure they held between themselves only, saying nothing to their aunts about it. Nell thought it was wiser to keep it to themselves.

"Until we see how things break," she had warned Chérie, and Chérie had followed her advice.

The clock downstairs boomed one, and Chérie started. "Half past seven!" she whispered in dismay, "I must go. . . . I shall be late!"

Noiselessly she opened her bedroom door and peeped out. The coast was clear, there was no one to be seen. Just as noiselessly she stole down the stairs to the lower hall. She unfastened the chain, and then, as she was about to turn the brass knob, a slight sound reached her ears. Nervously, she wheeled around, and to her consternation, beheld Aunt Abigail standing in the doorway of the living room. Startled, she stared at her aunt, fascinated by the angry glitter in those steel-gray eyes. She felt faint. Her knees trembled under her. She hoped she would not fall.

"Well, and where are you going so early, may I ask?" sneered Aunt Abigail, her lip curling back from her teeth.

No answer came from Chérie. She was unable to think clearly—her aunt's sudden appearance had scattered her wits. What was she saying?

"Why don't you answer me?" snapped her aunt. "Are you ashamed to tell where you are going?"

"No, I am not," retorted Chérie, stung into indignant anger by the taunt. "I am going to church in Woodhurst." And she drew herself up with a little haughty motion of her head.

"I thought so!" bitterly. "This is some of Eleanor's work. She delights in thwarting me. She always has thwarted me!"

Chérie was silent. She had nothing more to say, and time was flying. She glanced at the clock—five precious minutes had already been wasted in this useless quarrel, and she would be late unless she

started at once. She again turned to the door, but paused as her aunt stepped toward her, threateningly.

"Why did you lie to me?" she demanded, her voice loud and harsh. "You said you would go with me to church."

Chérie faced her, again. "No, not with you . . . I said to church, only . . . and I——" She felt ashamed. She should have declared herself. She should have been more honest. . . .

"Don't mince matters! A lie is a lie! No amount of juggling can change that! What could I expect? Didn't I get the same treatment from your father?"

Chérie was again fumbling at the knob, half-blinded with tears. Her father! To drag her father into this! How cruel! How cruel! Then a hand gripped her shoulder and swung her around to gaze again into her aunt's eyes. "How dare you defy me?" she cried, "I can stand anything but that. You took my money, you have foisted yourself upon us . . . and now you defy me!"

Chérie shook off the detaining hand, and shrank back against the door, out of her reach. The loan? She had been waiting to hear from Monsieur le Curé. Had he already written Aunt Abigail?

"You received a letter from Monsieur le Curé?" she said. "He was to send money. . . ."

"Yes!" contemptuously. "But there was no money, after your father's bills were paid. You have nothing except what I give you. If you defy me and go—you can go! I'll have no more to do with you. You understand?"

"Yes, I understand," said Chérie, slowly, as if translating her thoughts into the English necessary to convey her meaning. "If I go to my church this morning . . . I have no home . . . here," and she

glanced about, with a little sweeping wave of her hand.

"Yes . . . that is it . . . just that. What are you going to do?" stormed her aunt, impatiently.

"I must go . . . I shall be late . . . the walk is so long," answered Chérie, hurriedly.

With a snort of rage, Miss Abigail pushed her aside and opened the door wide. "Then go!" she cried, pulling the trembling girl forward and thrusting her out upon the porch. "And never come back!"

Chérie staggered against one of the posts, to which she clung a moment to regain her equilibrium. At that moment, the heavy front door slammed shut behind her. She shivered at the sound. She was now without a home! She had been thrust out! Where could she go? What would she do? Slowly she descended the steps leading down to the path, and felt her way through the filmy whiteness of the fog between her and the gate.

Outside, she turned to the left as Nell had impressed upon her, walking straight ahead.

"Follow your nose—and you'll get there," had been one of her cousin's instructions. Dear Nell! What would she say when she heard of this? What could she say? What could she do to help her? Nothing. Only God could help her! She would ask Him to direct her, to guard her! She would pray as she had never prayed before!

And then, suddenly, she thought of the scrap of paper in her bag, with Katherine Wolfson's signature upon it. "Five hundred dollars!" she exclaimed, aloud, joyfully. "And I never thought of it until now! I wish I had told her that I could pay her back the loan! Wouldn't she have been surprised? She was so——"

She stopped short, and looked around. She could distinguish nothing through the fog. Where was she? The landmarks she had been following had disappeared, and she could find no trace of them. She was lost in the fog, which seemed even denser now around her. She became panic-stricken, afraid to move either one way or the other. She stood there, waiting, praying. And as she stood, the measured beat of hoofs reached her strained ears. Some one was coming along the road driving a horse. She hoped he would pass near enough to her call. She supposed it was a man; surely, no woman would drive through such a fog.

She called as loud as she could, and a dark object emerged from the fog-blanket and stopped. She went closer to peer at the occupant of the small wagon, drawn by a gray horse; and found two pairs of round eyes staring into hers. She sighed with relief, smiling at the two half-scared, half-curious children. The boy was the driver and the girl leaned against him, evidently a little timid of this stranger out of the fog.

"I'm lost!" Chérie told them. "And I'm so glad you came!"

"Where do you want to go?" asked the boy, interested.

"I was going to church," she answered, "to Woodhurst."

"Gee, that's funny," he cried, "that's where we're going! I'll tell you what to do—you jump in and come with us! Move over, Dot . . . there's lots of room."

Dot moved closer to her brother, allowing Chérie space enough to crush in beside her. They listened shyly as she thanked them, swinging their feet to and fro in their embarrassment.

"Oh, that's all right!" said the boy, trying to talk in an offhand manner; "we're only too glad to help,

aren't we, Dot? You see, my sister and I drive in to Woodhurst every Sunday morning to Mass, and it was so foggy this morning Mom was nervous . . . but shucks, old Jack knows the way, blindfolded! You couldn't fool him, you know."

"I have heard that about horses," agreed Chérie; "do you think we'll be in time?"

"Sure," was the response. "This old horse isn't much to look at but he's got lots of pep in him, yet. And just imagine, he's three times my age and I'm ten! That sounds like a riddle, doesn't it?"

Chérie laughed. Up to this, the small girl had remained silent, allowing her brother to make all the advances, but now she looked at Chérie with a friendly smile, and whispered, "What's your name?"

"Chérie Lawson," was the prompt reply, "and your name is——"

"Dot," supplied the child, "Dot Brown . . . and my brother's name is Dash. We're twins—and they nicknamed us that, because we're always following each other about. Our really, truly names are John and Dorothy, but we like Dot and Dash. Don't we?" she appealed to her brother.

"You bet," he answered, "and so does Pop. He used to be a telegraph operator—I guess we remind him of old times."

"How nice that is!" Chérie murmured, feeling intensely interested in these friendly little ones. "Have you brothers or sisters?" she questioned, anxious to hear them tell of their home life.

"No," the boy answered, laughing, "we're the whole darn family."

Dot looked at him with marked disapproval in her round blue eyes.

"Mother told you not to say that again," she chided, "and you promised you wouldn't."

Dash glanced at Chérie. He hoped she wouldn't think he was that kind of boy. "But it was such a good chance!" he pleaded, with a little guilty laugh, "I just had to squeeze it in."

And all the time old Jack jogged onward toward their destination, and as they rattled through the now lessening fog, the children talked. They told of the farm, the district school, and many other things of interest. What a happy family! The father so strong, the mother so gentle! What peace and contentment these little anecdotes conveyed!

As they drew up in front of the church, they could see the people crowding up the steps, to the wide-opened doors.

"When you come out, stand right here," called Dash after Chérie, as she crossed the sidewalk, "we'll drive you back."

Chérie turned to smile at them, nodding approvingly.

"I'll come!" she answered under her breath, her voice not reaching those about her. But the children understood, and were satisfied.

CHAPTER VIII

Chérie Goes Home with the Twins

IN THE meantime Nell was having troubles of her own. Miss Greenwood's strident tones coming from the lower hall had awakened her from a sound sleep. She sprang from her bed in terror, anticipating everything from fire to burglars. That was her aunt's voice! Probably she was calling for help! Enough for Nell! Casting aside all personal fear, she threw on her dressing-gown and thrust her feet into her slippers. And it was not until she was on her way downstairs, that the cause of the disturbance came to her. Chérie! It must be Chérie! And for the space of a second she stood still, her gaze fastened on Miss Abigail's gaunt figure as the key was turned in the lock. What had she done to Chérie? Had she banished her from the house?

A stair creaked. Her aunt faced her, gazing resentfully at the girl. "Well," curtly, "what do *you* want?"

Nell felt the color flame in her cheeks at the intended rudeness in words and manner.

"Where is Chérie?" she demanded.

"I suppose you mean Mehitable?" And Aunt Abigail raised her brows. "If so," she continued, "you know where she is as well as I do. Everything was arranged between you, it seems."

"Well, we'll let it go. That's that!" retorted Nell. "What were you saying to her?"

"I have a right to say what I please, I wish you

to understand. She went to her church against my will. She defied me. . . . I told her this was no longer her home . . . that she must never come back."

Nell started. "But you can't do that!" she cried. "You brought her here and you have to take care of her according to law. I know that much from Civics. Why, you've left yourself liable, doing a thing like that. You had no right to turn her out of this house. You've made her what they call a public charge, Aunt, and if the authorities hear of it—whew!"

Abigail Greenwood turned pale. This was something she had not taken into consideration. Eleanor was right. She had contracted to care for her niece until she was able to support herself. Why, that girl was to prove a veritable "little old man of the sea!"

Nell, quick to see her advantage, continued. "Of course, you'll have to deal directly with Washington."

"Washington?" repeated Aunt Abigail, frowning in perplexity. "What has Washington to do with it?"

"Everything," answered Nell. "It's a Federal law, and the Government is merciless."

Miss Abigail could say nothing, for Nell's knowledge and assurance sickened her completely. The girl knew what she was talking about!

For a brief period her pride and self-complacency deserted her, leaving her miserably aware of her shortcomings. For that brief period Abigail Greenwood stood revealed to herself in her true character, as clearly as if a veil had been lifted. How old and helpless she felt! How little she knew of present-day conditions! How horribly local she was in all her activities! How narrow . . . how prejudiced! It was this chit of a girl who forced her to see herself in this very unflattering light. Never had she been

criticized! Never before had any person dared to question her in any matter. She flashed an angry glance toward her niece, and her thin lips tightened obstinately. Already the veil of arrogance was lowering, and her resentment doubled. How impertinent Eleanor was! How dared she sit in judgment upon her, as if she were guilty of a crime? Such audacity! She would not endure such treatment! She, Abigail Greenwood, looked upon by all her friends and acquaintances as most exemplary, most righteous, most charitable!

"You forget yourself, Eleanor Brooks, assuming such an attitude and speaking to me in such a manner," she exclaimed, the old dominance ringing in her tones. "Remember, there are two sides to every story, and my side has to be told as well as hers."

"But she hasn't said a word," defended Nell, "and wouldn't if you let her alone. I can't see yet why you turned her out."

"No, you couldn't . . . I wouldn't expect that much of you. You have no more consideration for me than she has. I know that! I have my standing in church to keep up, as well as my standing in the town. The eyes of Oldville are upon me, and I will not allow your cousin to make a laughingstock of me. So, when she defied me, regardless of the criticism and humiliation she would bring upon me, I felt justified in sending her away."

"Well, take a tip from me, my dear aunt," advised Nell irreverently, "and ask her to come back."

"I'll never have her back," she raged, angered by Nell's audacity. "Why should I?"

"Just to save yourself, if for nothing else," Nell said casually, as she turned to go up stairs. "It is quite immaterial to me. . . . Suit yourself."

As she went on, she heard Aunt Abigail gasp at her insolence, but she said no word in retaliation. She merely stood glaring at Nell's ascending figure, and then in impotent rage went into the living room and banged the door after her.

When Nell reached the top of the stairs she almost ran into Miss Eliza, who had been peering down, shortsightedly, to ascertain the reason of this heated conversation, her flowing gown of blue draped about her ample proportions, and her hair twisted in curlers that stood out like horns above her forehead.

"What is it about?" she panted, anxiously. "I heard voices in my sleep, and I dreamed Abigail was angry with me . . . and I was trembly and shaky when I awoke."

"No one knows her better than you do, Aunt Eliza," declared Nell, putting her arm about her aunt, and leading her back to her room. "But this time Chérie has displeased her."

"And where is the poor child?" asked Miss Eliza in a whisper.

"Aunt Abigail has sent her away——"

"But she can't send her away!" interrupted Aunt Eliza. "Not unless I——" She stopped short, and looked about her nervously. "I hope she didn't hear me," she muttered, as she entered her room and closed the door, leaving Nell in the hall.

Nell shook her head, as she went to her room. Poor Eliza! Poor any one who had to put up with Abigail Greenwood. She glanced at a window as she passed, and shivered. The fog was pressing against the glass, like a white cloud. Where was Chérie? She would be lost! She could never find her way to Woodhurst in this fog!

"She'll come back when she finds how bad it is—

she'll come back anyhow to get her things," Nell said to herself. "She knows I'm ready to fight my weight in wildcats for her . . . so she'll come, all right, all right!"

As Chérie came down the steps of the church, she saw Dot and Dash seated in the wagon waiting. As soon as they spied her, they waved wildly to attract her attention, quite unconscious that their gyrations were amusing the out-coming congregation.

"How did you get here before me?" asked Chérie, as she climbed into the wagon, and settled down beside Dot. "Did you leave old Jack here?"

"Oh, no," answered Dash, "we wouldn't treat old Jack that way. No, sir, we put him in that shed over there, and it doesn't take a minute to get him. And then we always sit in the back pew, and are the first out." And he clicked his tongue, making old Jack almost jump into action.

"Do you see how fast he runs when he's going home?" queried Dot, smiling at Chérie as they flew along the road.

Chérie laughed. "Maybe he wants his breakfast as much as I do," she remarked; "he knows he'll get it soon." But where was she to get breakfast? Who cared about her?

"If you come home with us," invited Dash, eagerly, "Mom will give you some breakfast. She always has something waiting for us."

Chérie's heart bounded. "Oh, I would love that," she cried, "to go to your house . . . to meet your mother——"

"And Pop," interrupted Dot. "You'll just love

Pop. He tells the nicest stories 'bout Indians . . . and ghosts, and things.''

When Chérie saw Pop Brown, she understood why Dot wished him to be featured as well as her mother. His boyish face and figure made him appear years younger than he really was. He was pleasant to all, his honesty, his goodwill and his patience were proverbial in the county, and in his gray eyes lurked depths of feeling, ready to come forth at any appeal for help, to succor the needy, or battle for the weak.

Just to look at them one would know that Mom Brown and he made a delightful couple, congenial and loving. She had been the prettiest girl in the county he always said. And she invariably hushed him, and a blush would creep up into the thin cheeks, once so round and rosy. But she liked to hear him say it. Praise from him was wine to her. To her, he was always the handsome, light-hearted boy she had won away from all the other girls, and he would never be older to her, even when his hair had turned to silver and the wrinkles of old age marred his face.

They were both very cordial in their greetings to Chérie as she entered the house with the twins, who brought her at once to the kitchen to have coffee. The table was drawn near the range, and the glowing logs added comfort to the room. The children ate but little, running in and out, dragging in various dogs and cats to show their guest. Chérie was delighted. This was a real home. There was no discord here. She wished she could stay with these good people.

She was alone with Mr. and Mrs. Brown. The twins had rushed out on another expedition to round up some kittens in the barn, and would be back presently, exhibiting their tiny prisoners.

''Dash tells me your name is Lawson, and that you

live yonder with your aunts,'' remarked Mr. Brown, helping himself to some toast.

''Yes, my name is Lawson,'' Chérie informed him, ''and the Misses Greenwood are my aunts.''

''Then you must be Fred Lawson's daughter?'' he said reflectively.

''Oh, you knew him,'' she asked, eagerly, ''you knew my dear father?''

''Indeed I did. We were boys together and we used to go to the same school,'' he told her, ''and later, when we were men, although he was at college and I was the telegraph operator at Oldville, we still kept up our friendship. You know I wasn't a farmer until Dot and Dash came to town,'' he went on. ''There's no place like a farm for kiddies. There is no other place where they can have the same freedom, the fresh air and the nourishing food. It was hard work, but I'm repaid a thousandfold. I often think of the good times your father and I used to knock out of that old dead-and-alive town,'' and he smiled, as happy memories crowded upon him.

Chérie had been listening, leaning forward, intent on every word that fell from the farmer's lips; and now, as he ceased speaking, she straightened up, sighing. Mr. Brown gazed at the slight, black-clad figure before him; as he gazed his eyes clouded and the smile left his lips. ''Tell me . . . is—is he dead?'' he asked.

Sadly, Chérie inclined her head, tears filling her dark eyes, and she murmured, brokenly, ''A month almost . . . he is dead.''

''And your mother, child?''

''My mother died three years ago,'' and the pain in the young voice made the farmer and his wife wince. ''I came to my aunts to make my home with

them . . . but this morning—Aunt Abigail told me not to come back . . . that it was not my home, any more."

"Why?" asked Mrs. Brown in surprise.

"I displeased her," answered Chérie, without going into details, not wishing to bare the real cause of the quarrel to Aunt Abigail's country neighbors. "And she told me to go."

"Well, she was in big business to send Fred's girl adrift," came in indignant tones from Mr. Brown; "but she was always hard . . . mighty hard on poor Fred, too."

"What will you do, my child?" anxiously from Mrs. Brown. "Have you any place to go?"

Chérie shook her head. "I have some money," she confided, thinking of the check in her handbag. "I can board somewhere."

"Why not stay with us for a few days?" she invited, cordially, "and take your time to think things out?"

"Yes," supplemented her husband, heartily, "stay as long as you like. Fred Lawson's daughter is welcome to anything we have, eh, Mom?"

"You want *me?*" Chérie said, gazing in amazement from husband to wife, and from wife to husband.

"We sure do!" Mr. Brown assured her, "you're as welcome as the flowers in May, my dear girl." And Mrs. Brown drew her in her motherly arms and kissed the trembling lips, just as the twins bounded into the kitchen, their arms piled high with wild beasts in miniature.

"I think," remarked Chérie after duly praising the beauty of the tiny specimens of catdom, "that I

shall return now. I must pack my trunk and tell Nell all that has happened."

"And who is Nell, my dear?" asked Mrs. Brown. "Does she also live with your aunts?"

"No, Nell is only visiting. She lives in New York, and her name is Eleanor Brooks."

"Then she's a cousin of yours," and the farmer nodded his head. "I remember her father, going about with Fred . . . and Bob Brooks was an all-right chap, too! But come, Mom, Lady Elizabeth is at the door," he continued, turning to his wife.

"That's what Pop calls the flivver," explained Dash, noticing the look of bewilderment on Chérie's face.

"Yes," laughed Mr. Brown, "and we'll have to burn up gas to make church this morning," pulling out his watch and glancing at it. "We've only got about ten minutes."

"You're not going," wailed Dot, as she saw Chérie preparing to depart also. "Don't let her go, Mom! Dear knows when we'll ever find any girl as nice! Don't let her go!"

"I shall come back, Dot," promised Chérie, kissing the little girl; "your parents have asked me to stay here with you, to visit you."

"Oh, goody!" cried Dot, clapping her hands, and Dash gave a piercing whistle to register his joy.

"Come, Mom, we'll be late," called Mr. Brown from without.

"I'll be there in a second," she answered, standing in the doorway. "And Dash," she continued, "you and Dot take old Jack and drive Chérie over to her aunts. Then you'll be sure to bring her back."

CHAPTER IX

A Surprise for Chérie

AS OLD Jack turned the corner, Chérie saw how she had lost her bearings in the fog. She had followed the fence around, without a thought of this intersecting crossroad.

"That's where you turned without knowing it," said Dash, pointing back, "and you didn't notice it."

Chérie laughed. "It was a good thing. If I had not been lost I would not know you now, nor Dot . . . nor your father and mother——"

"Gee whiz!" interrupted Dash, "it was luckier for us, wasn't it, Dot? Look at the good time we've had with you!"

"And I wish you'd stay with us always," chimed in Dot, "you're so much fun!"

Chérie glanced at the two earnest faces in surprise. Surely, the gain was all hers! They had helped her. She had done nothing. Then she put her arm about Dot and drew her closer. What a dear girl! And Dash? Oh, she loved them both! How nice it would be to have them with her for the next few days!

"That is my aunt's house," she told the twins, as the old Greenwood mansion came into view. And as Dash brought Jack to a standstill, she wondered if all were at church. She dreaded delay. She hoped some one was at home to let her in—perhaps Nell was waiting for her, and would open the door. Dear Nell! How much she had to tell her!

The twins watched her lift the iron knocker on the

big front door, waiting, expectantly, for the bang that followed. Then the door was opened a little way and Chérie disappeared, leaving them perched on the wagon seat; their round, blue eyes fastened on the now-closed door, while back and forth they swung their bright-stockinged legs.

It was not Nell who opened the door for Chérie. It was Sarah, and she was suffering from a toothache. She had been unable to attend morning service, and was lying down with hot salt against her cheek. She glared at the girl as she passed, indignant at being disturbed, and her grumbling voice followed Chérie all the way upstairs, to the little room she had occupied since her arrival.

As she crossed the threshold she spied a tray covered with a linen napkin on a small table near the window. She lifted the napkin and saw a plate of toast and a cup of coffee. Toast and coffee were quite cold. Somebody had thought of her! Nell, of course! There was no one else who cared what became of her.

She opened the drawers of the dressing table and emptied them of their contents. The small trunk she had brought from home was still in the room, and she at once proceeded to pack her belongings. The trunk was of leather, brass-bound, and had held her mother's trousseau when Fred Lawson and his wife went on their honeymoon trip into Switzerland. Often and often she had heard of this wonderful trip. The grandeur of the hotel where they stayed, and the concerts and the balls they attended. She sighed. She was glad her little mother had enjoyed such pleasure in her short life. It wasn't much—only one month, and then money losses swept all such pleasures from their path through the ensuing years. But the memory of that month was with her to the end.

Chérie hastily brushed away the tears before they could fall, and closing the lid, locked the trunk. Then she heard a sound. Some one was coming up the stairs. She drew herself up and waited, her eyes on the door.

"Well, I'm glad you're back," said Nell, as she entered the room and rushed over to Chérie, kissing the tear-wet cheeks. "I was so worried about you, little cousin, I couldn't stay any longer in church. I just had to see if you were here."

"I came for my trunk, Nell . . . and to see you," Chérie told her, with a loving glance from her dark eyes. "I have no home now."

"Yes, yes, I know all about it. Aunt Abigail and I had it hot and heavy, right down in the hall. She was locking the door after you, and told me she had just turned you out of the house. Believe me, Xantippe, I told her a few things. I told her that as she had brought you here, she was under contract to Uncle Sam to take care of you, that she daren't turn you away. If she did she would be making you a public charge, and herself a criminal, in the eyes of the law. That scared her, some. I suppose she thought she could do as she pleased where you were concerned, but yours truly jostled her a bit. I think she'll be good, now, and ask you to come back and forget it."

"Oh, no, no," cried Chérie, shrinking back, "I couldn't live with her again. I would die, Nell! Please don't ask me to come back."

Nell looked at her, compassion in her glance. The poor girl was trembling, and the color had left her cheeks. "Little cousin, I don't blame you, but what are you going to do?" she asked.

"I shall stay with the Browns a few days," answered Chérie, brightening; "and then I shall decide."

"The Browns!" repeated Nell in astonishment. "Who are they?" She did not know that Chérie had other friends.

"Oh, I met them this morning . . . through the twins," explained Chérie. "I was lost in the fog. The twins were driving to church and came upon me, and took me with them in the wagon."

"Wait, Chérie, let me get this right," in a puzzled tone. "Who are the twins?"

"Dot and Dash are the twins, and they live on a farm near here, with their parents. When we came back from church, I went to see them and they gave me breakfast. Oh, they were so good to me, Nell, and asked me to stay 'to think things out,' they said."

Nell was startled. Already Aunt Abigail's treatment of her niece was known by the neighbors! She wished Chérie had said nothing to those strangers. But she didn't blame her. Who could?

"The twins are outside, Nell," continued Chérie; "they drove me over for my trunk and——"

"Oh," ejaculated Nell, a light suddenly dawning on her, "are those the two little tykes, sitting up so straight in that wagon with the old spavined horse? They gave me the once over as I came in."

Chérie nodded. "Yes, you have seen the twins, Nell."

"And you intend to stay with those people?" asked Nell, drawing her brows together in a perplexed frown.

"Only for a day or so," was the answer.

"And then, what?" persisted Nell.

"Then? I do not know," admitted Chérie, sadness creeping into her voice as she gazed into Nell's troubled eyes.

"Poor little kid," thought Nell, "she's surely up

against it." She would have to come back here to live. The law that would compel Abigail Greenwood to live up to her contract would also compel her niece to return to her guardianship. What was to be done? She couldn't think. If only she could get in touch with Dad and Mother, but that was impossible, now! To-morrow afternoon they would meet in New York, but that would be too late to help Chérie, as she wished to help her. No, there was only one thing that she could do unassisted and with a tightening of her lips, she decided to do it. Her parents would not object once they understood. What difference could it make if the explanation came after instead of before? They were always ready to listen to her, always ready to help her.

"You don't know where you are going?" she queried, in as casual a tone as she could assume.

Chérie shook her head, slowly. Her gaze wandered to the window where the bared branches kept tapping the glass as they swayed in the wind. "No," she answered, "I do not know . . . yet."

"I do," observed Nell, quietly.

"You do?" Chérie's eyes were again turned upon her cousin. What was Nell saying? Was she joking? "How can you know, Nell?"

Nell could control herself no longer. "Because you are coming to New York with me," she cried, a triumphant ring in her voice, and throwing both arms about Chérie she waltzed her around the room.

"But . . . but . . . Nell," protested Chérie, as she was whirled this way and that, "tell me what you mean."

Nell stopped, her breath coming in little gasps. "In a minute," she panted. "I just thought of it.

It's the only way out of this muddled-up business between you and Aunt Abigail."

"Yes, yes," urged Chérie, "go on, Nell. . . ."

"Don't rush me Chérie," she laughed, "and I'll explain. You can come to visit me. I am your cousin, so nothing can be said about that. It's all in the family. Aunt Abigail doesn't want you, and you don't want her . . . so it's the only way, little cousin."

Chérie stood silent, amazement giving place to satisfaction within her. The only way! But what a wonderful way! To be with Nell! To have her friend always with her! It was too good to be true! She could not believe it. "Say it again," she pleaded, clasping her hands together in a sort of ecstasy. "Nell, say it again."

Nell laughed happily. "You—are—coming—with—me—to—New—York—Chérie — and — that's — not —maybe! As for the rest, they can settle things later. . . . I don't care. You may stay at the Brown's farm to-night, but you'll have to be at the depot in the morning at eleven-ten."

Chérie gasped. In the excitement she had forgotten the Browns. And outside the twins were patiently waiting for her. "Oh," she murmured, a trifle conscience-stricken, "I must tell them . . . they have been so good to me. My trunk, Nell—shall I take it?"

"No, leave it here," advised Nell, "it can go with mine in the morning by express. The train, Chérie . . . you'll be there on time?"

"Indeed, yes! Mr. Brown and Madame Elizabeth will have me there in time," Chérie assured her, demurely. (And Nell thought Madame Elizabeth was Mrs. Brown until she saw the four-cylinder car bumping up to the depot the following morning.)

"Mr. Brown knew my father and yours, Nell,"

went on Chérie; "they were boys together. And you must meet the twins. They are wonderful children. They drive old Jack everywhere. They have no fear and their parents trust them so much. And their pets! I never saw so many before in my life. Dogs, cats, and little kittens that spit and growl like wild beasts."

She ceased speaking, abruptly, her lips apart, a far-away look in her eyes. The dreams she had dreamed that night in Paris suddenly came to her mind. She was again curled up in the big chair in the shabby room. Again she read Aunt Abigail's letter, and again she was dreaming of the wild beasts in the strange land . . . and the beautiful fairy. . . .

"Oh, Nell," sh cried, gazing into Nell's startled eyes, "you were the fairy; you saved me . . . I remember now!"

"What are you talking about, Chérie?" demanded Nell, anxiously. All this had been too much for this cousin of hers. She was so flushed and her eyes were so bright. "It's no wonder," she thought bitterly, as she placed her hand on Chérie's head.

Chérie smiled. "I am not ill, dear Nell," she protested, catching her cousin's hand and rubbing her cheek caressingly against it. "Since I saw you that first day, it was as if I had met you before. But the thought would be gone as it came! But I know now. It was the dream I had that night in Paris. The night I received Aunt Abigail's letter. I dreamed of wild beasts and a fairy saved me from them, and the fairy had your face, Nell, your hair——"

Nell drew her hand away from Chérie's with a sudden movement, and lightly ran her fingers over her face and through her blond curls. "Not my face nor my hair!" she said with a little grimace. "Neither

comes off. But go on! Things are getting spooky. Cold shivers are chasing each other up and down my back. Go on! Tell me more!"

"There is no more to tell. It was only a dream, but it was so strange. You are my fairy . . . you have saved me——"

"Spare my blushes, sweet maid," entreated Nell.

"Nell, Nell, you've been wonderful to me, and I'll never——"

"Forget it! There, I finished your sentence for you, but that is also my wish. Forget it! If everything is packed, I'd like to interview the twins. Poor kids, they'll be tired waiting."

Chérie glanced about the room, searchingly. "I am ready!" she said, and slipping her handbag on her arm, she picked up her small case from a chair, and followed her cousin out into the hall.

A little later as the twins saw the girls emerge from the house and come toward them, a panicky feeling of self-consciousness stole over them. That must be Nell, Chérie's cousin! How she laughed! Perhaps she was laughing at them! They didn't care! She wasn't as nice as Chérie by a long shot. No sir-ee!

"Well, kiddies, and how is the world using you?" said Nell as Chérie introduced them.

But Dot and Dash remained silent, and Chérie looked her surprise at their want of politeness. She couldn't understand it. She knew Dot was shy, but Dash the brave—what had happened to him?

"Dash, speak to Cousin Nell," she whispered, as she climbed into the wagon; "speak to her."

Dash glanced about furtively, as if seeking a chance to escape the ordeal; but Chérie's command he couldn't ignore and he turned his eyes on Nell with a painfully resigned air, muttering, "Glad to meet

you, ma'am,'' as he started up old Jack with a slap of the reins.

Nell looked after them, waving a farewell as they went down the road. So those were the twins! They seemed to adore Chérie, with all their shyness. How disappointed they would be when they learned of the trip she was to take in the morning.

She turned away and went in through the gate, walking up the path to the porch. The trees were losing the last of their frost-blackened leaves, and their naked branches, gaunt and spectral, swished together in the rising wind, making dismal sounds. She felt lonesome. She would be glad to leave this place, and its grim surroundings. And to think that Chérie was going with her to New York! How wonderful that was!

''I'll say so,'' she said, aloud, as she closed the front door, and crossed the hall to the living room.

CHAPTER X

Home with Nell

CHÉRIE gave a sigh of content as she sank into the luxurious velvet chair facing the window, double glassed and silk-curtained. She glanced at Nell, who, with parted lips and eager eyes, was directing the porter in the disposal of their hats and coats in the rack overhead. How happy she was! How happy they both were! At last they were on their way to New York! Presently the train would start, and Oldville and all that was in it would be left far behind—but the memories of the time spent there were hers, and she was taking them with her; and often in the years to come she would feel again the heartaches and pleasures of the past few days.

There was a delightful stillness about her. Even passing footsteps lost themselves in the deep-piled carpet. How different this was to the crowded coach she had come in to Oldville! The coach in which she had occupied half the seat with Thomas, listening to his droning voice as he tried to entertain her and make the journey less tedious.

They were out in the open now. It was still snowing, as it had been since last night; the trees, the hedges and the fields were mantled in white; tiny flakes swirled and eddied past the windows as the train flew onward. She wondered what Dot and Dash were doing. They had refused to go to school that morning because she was going away from them, and

their mother had not insisted, knowing their sorrow and disappointment.

"I was so sorry for poor little Dot!" she said, leaning toward her cousin. "She cried so. And Dash was inconsolable."

"Yes," agreed Nell, "they are the type. You could tell that by just looking at them. They ought to remind you of Aunt Abigail."

"Aunt Abigail?" repeated Chérie, surprised. "No, Nell . . . not Aunt Abigail!"

"Yes, Chérie," contradicted her cousin, smiling. "She's so very different to the kind and loving Browns, that you're bound to think of her by contrast."

Chérie laughed. "Maybe," she agreed, "but in no other way, Nell."

"She's so happy to be rid of you, dear cousin," asserted Nell, "that she even feels grateful to me."

"But not as grateful as I am! nor as happy, Nell! I would never have gone back to her . . . again."

"What else could you have done, Chérie? Where could you have gone, with no money ——"

Chérie opened her handbag, and passed Katherine Wolfson's check to her cousin. "Have you forgotten that, Nell?" she asked.

"Well, what do you know?" cried Nell, surprised. "I had forgotten all about it. Isn't that strange? It must have been the excitement and fuss with Aunt Abigail that knocked it completely out of my mind. Oh, I'm so glad you have it. Dad can bank this for you and you'll always feel independent."

"I must pay Aunt Abigail first, Nell. . . . She sent the money for my expenses to America," explained Chérie, earnestly.

"I don't see why," objected Nell. "She sent for

you; by so doing she made herself responsible for any amount spent on the journey."

Chérie shook her head, as she put the check back in her handbag. "No, no, Nell, I owe her that, and I'll pay it," she declared. "She thought my father left me money or she wouldn't have sent for me at all."

Nell glanced toward the window and her lips tightened. So that was it. Miss Abigail's pocket had been touched—that was the reason she had shown such dislike to Chérie when she met her for the first time on the porch! Nell had been puzzled then—but now she understood. She had heard her father say that Abigail Greenwood was miserly, that "she would skin a flea for its hide," was the way he expressed himself. That she had blocked Eliza's marriage in order to keep control of her sister's part of the estate, he firmly believed. Her great resentment toward Fred Lawson had been caused by the withdrawal of his money from her pet investments when he was twenty-one. When she heard of his death she thought she could regain control of the money. So she sent for Chérie, that she might bring back with her all that her father had left her, and place it in her hands, to reinvest for her dear niece. How she loved the power that money brought! Her disappointment must have been terrible when she learned that Chérie had nothing! No wonder she loathed the sight of this poor little cousin.

It was while they were at dinner, yesterday, that she had spoken of Chérie to her aunts. "She will come home with me on a visit," she told them, in a matter-of-fact tone, "and your friends need never know."

Miss Abigail was silent. She didn't wish to appear

too joyful before Nell, but she felt as if a ton weight had been lifted from her shoulders. To rid herself of this incubus in such a simple manner! All she was supposed to do was to give her consent to the proposed visit to New York! Incredible! What a relief! Why, the girl wouldn't even be in the house when the minister and his wife came to dinner next Wednesday evening! Her house would be as it had always been—running on the well-oiled wheels of self-respect and pride, with only an occasional squeak from Eliza or a growl from Sarah.

"What is it to be—yes or no?" demanded Nell.

"I am sure the change would be good for her, Eleanor," she answered, "but your parents have to be considered. They may object."

"To Chérie? Not when they see her," she replied; "and they will write and arrange things with you."

That was all. Of the necessary business attached to the transfer of Chérie, she knew nothing, and didn't waste a thought thereon. They could do that themselves. The main thing was to take her cousin to New York, to make her feel that she was loved, that she was wanted, that she had a home.

On and on thundered the train, as the cousins gazed silently out through the snow-speckled glass, the telegraph poles whirling by like so many sentinels. On and on, every revolution of the wheels carrying them nearer and nearer to their destination to the Mecca of America, to the great city in which all who come to it find their level, sooner or later.

Chérie turned her head, and let her glance rest on thought-absorbed Nell, watching, for a moment or so, expressions as they came and passed about her mouth and in her eyes. Of what was she thinking? Was she living over again the events of the last few days? How

wonderful Nell had been! And the Browns! The hearty, wholesome father of the twins, the twins themselves, with their many interests and numerous pets, who had room enough in their hearts for the stranger they found in the fog. And their grief when they discovered that she was leaving them so soon.

"I don't like your old cousin Nell," sobbed Dot; "she has no right to take you from us. We found you, and findin's keepin', isn't it, Dash?" and her tears trickled down her round, pink cheeks.

Dash nodded his head, grimly. He couldn't answer; he might cry like Dot. And he didn't want Chérie to think him a baby. Besides, if her cousin Nell heard about it, she would laugh, sure thing!

"You must write, Chérie," and Mrs. Brown wiped away the moisture from her own eyes. "Let us know how you like the change, and if ——" She paused a second and then went on, "Well, if you find that you are not satisfied, come back to us, and make this your home."

"That motion is seconded, little girl," declared Mr. Brown, as the twins, in their excitement, threw their arms about her, strangling her with bear-like hugs. "Seconded and carried," he added with a laugh.

Even supposing—she glanced again at Nell, still wrapped in thought. Nell would never fail her, never! Who but Nell would have fought for her? And now she was going with her to share her home, to attend school, to make new friends.

Just then a porter came through the car, announcing that luncheon was ready.

Nell arose and reached for her coat, taking Chérie's down with it. "Might as well go now," she remarked,

"it will be less crowded. . . . You know everybody and his wife go later."

"Yes?" murmured Chérie, bewildered by this sudden move on the part of her cousin. "Where are we going, Nell?"

"Just to have a bite to eat," laughed Nell, helping Chérie with her coat. "Come along. We don't need our hats."

"But I am not the least little bit hungry," protested Chérie, "I had a very late breakfast, Nell."

"So had I—but that doesn't matter in the least. You can order as much or as little as you need, and it helps to pass the time away between here and the city. It is only half-past twelve, now," she continued, showing her watch to her cousin, "and it will be after four when we arrive at the Grand Central."

And after four it was when they stepped from the train in the glassed-over space, and walked the long distance into the brilliantly lighted concourse beyond to wend their way around the waiting groups, and through the hurrying throngs. Sorrow and gladness mingled together under this roof. Here they passed a bridal couple, laughing and talking with their friends. There, a family of mourners whose loved one was even now in the baggage coach of the train that would carry them to see him laid in his last resting place.

"Dad and Mother will be in the Pennsylvania Station in less than an hour," Nell told her cousin as they were about to board the subway train that would take them almost to the door of the apartment house in which the Brooks family dwelt. "That will give us time to furbish up a little before they get home."

Like one in a dream Chérie followed Nell through the splendid entrance into a beautiful hall, furnished

in old English style, across which they walked to the elevator.

When they reached the eighth floor, both stepped into the white marble corridor. At the far end, Nell stopped and fumbled in her handbag, almost throwing out its contents in her eagerness to secure the object of her search.

"Dad says I carry everything in here except the kitchen range, and I think he's about right," she laughed, as she at last produced the key.

The reception hall which they now entered was quite imposing, with its costly rug and velvet draperies, through which one could see the beautiful rooms beyond, but Nell continued along a narrow hallway that led from it, and Chérie followed.

"I am taking you to my very own room," Nell told her cousin, "the room you and I will share from now on."

Chérie gasped with delight when she beheld the white-paneled walls, the rose-tinted silk draping the windows and enveloping the twin beds, the toilet accessories of ivory scattered on the triple-mirrored dressing table and chiffonier.

"Oh," she ejaculated, "how lovely, Nell!"

And she felt almost overwhelmed as she realized the extent of her cousin's generosity. To think that she was willing to share this wonderful room with any one! And then the white-enameled desk in the corner, with the white bookshelf above, containing many brightly bound volumes, caught her glance, which lingered there hungrily.

Nell laughed. "You like the books, don't you, Chérie? So do I, little cousin. Oh, what a great time we will have together!"

"But, Nell, you are giving everything . . . I nothing!"

"Don't say that, Chérie. It isn't true. You are giving me more than you know. I have always craved for a sister. I have prayed for one night after night, since I was a tiny tot. And now, I have you, a girl of my own age, a companion, a pal. Don't you understand what you mean to me, Chérie? Don't you understand how you will satisfy the heart-hunger I have had for a sister of my own?"

Chérie's eyes filled with tears, but they were tears of joy. "Oh, Nell," she murmured, "I am so happy just because you want me."

The closing of a door startled them, and for a moment they gazed into one another's eyes, uncertainly. Then a little cough made Nell smile fondly. "Oh, it's Mother, Chérie, and Dad! I'm so glad they are home. Now I can tell them everything."

"I shall wait here for you, Nell?"

"Yes, little cousin, you wait here until I come for you. I want to tell them all about Aunt Abigail, and all about you . . . before they see you. Chérie, ask your good God to help me!"

Chérie sank to her knees as the door closed after Nell, and buried her face in the rose-colored spread. Her heart pounded within her, and a strange fluttering in her throat sickened her. Suppose they would not listen to Nell's explanation? What then? Would she have to go back to Aunt Abigail? Was she really her aunt's ward in the eyes of the law?

All these thoughts raced through her mind, as, tortured with anxiety, she awaited her cousin's return. After what seemed to her ages of time, she heard a sound at the door.

She raised her head, and sprang to her feet, staring

at the group in the doorway. Nell was there with her father and mother. All were smiling. And Nell was coming toward her.

"Here are Mother and Dad, Chérie," said Nell, kissing her white cheeks, and leading her to them; "they love you, too . . . and they want you."

Nell's pretty mother clasped her in her arms, and kissed the trembling lips that Chérie raised like a child to hers.

"Welcome, little cousin," cried Nell's tall dad, in his jolly way. "We are mighty glad to have you with us, oh, so glad."

Chérie glanced at each one in turn, lovingly, and murmured, shyly, "Thank you! Thank you! I am glad, too. . . ."

CHAPTER XI

Two Unexpected Visitors

IT WAS Christmas Eve. Snow had been in the air all day and was now whitening the ground in spots, leaving the rest of the pavement shining under the lights, like so many small pools of inky water. Up and down the length of the block pedestrians hurried, endeavoring to reach the subway station at one corner, or the brilliant busses glimmering by at the other.

Chérie curled herself up on the wide window seat and pressed her face against the blurred glass, peering down. How busy every one was! How happy! Hearty voices, wishing the merriest of greetings, floated up to her. She smiled as she listened. This must be the Christmas Spirit. Peace and goodwill on earth! The gifts of the good God to His creatures!

She turned from the window with a happy little sigh, and glanced about the handsomely furnished dining room. How good these cousins had been to her! Here, for three weeks, she had been in a real home. Here, she had found love and happiness with Nell and her dear parents. And Robert Brooks and his wife had become very fond of the lonely girl sent adrift by Abigail Greenwood.

"You are Nell's cousin, too, Chérie," said Mrs. Brooks, "so why not call your cousin Robert, Uncle Bob; and make me another aunt . . . Aunt Lottie? Wouldn't that be better?"

Chérie not only agreed with her—she was de-

lighted. It seemed to make Nell's relationship that much closer. Dear, whole-souled, fun-making Nell! Nell, who remained just as lovable, just as true as she had ever been. Generously dividing everything, even as she had shared with her the rose-draped, white-paneled room down the hall on the night of her arrival.

At present she was alone. Uncle Bob and Aunt Lottie were at the theater, and Nell had gone on a secret mission to the dressmaker in the next block. Mystery pervaded the whole house. Presents were everywhere, some hidden in drawers, in wardrobes, under couches, others flagrantly in view, their highly colored tissue coverings tied with gaudy ribbons, labeled and sealed with dozens of miniature portrayals of a red-capped, white-whiskered Santa Claus.

She had shopped with each in turn. She was the confidant of each member of the household in all save that which concerned herself. In this delightful ignorance was the thrill of expectation. What was she to receive? She hoped Nell would like the silk scarf she had selected as a gift for the dearest girl in the world! And Uncle Bob's cigar holder . . . and Aunt Lottie's slippers. . . .

After Christmas she was going to school. She had been given a test by the proper authorities and was found well advanced in 8B work. So she was to go into the graduating class of a near-by public school to take the finals, which would entitle her to enter high school if she passed with the required percentage.

As for Aunt Abigail, she had half-heartedly agreed to pay a weekly sum to Robert Brooks for Chérie's board until she was able to support herself. "I did enjoy making the old lady come across," confided

Uncle Bob to his wife, "but it was a shame to let her off so cheap."

"But we don't want board from Chérie," objected Aunt Lottie, a trifle indignantly.

"Of course not," he laughed, "though we won't let my lady Shylock know that. Abigail Greenwood's weekly donation makes Chérie independent . . . it will supply her with pocket money."

Chérie had heard nothing from Aunt Abigail, directly. Uncle Bob had advised her to bank the five hundred dollars which she had received from Mrs. Wolfson as a reward for finding her pearl necklace, but first she insisted on returning to Abigail Greenwood the amount she had sent her to bring her to America. She paid back the loan, sending the money by postal order, and all she received in acknowledgment was the returned registration card, signed by her aunt.

Still Chérie thought of her and of Aunt Eliza. She pitied them, they were so alone! This she had told Nell, and Nell suggested buying them gifts. An artificial rose, highly perfumed, was selected for each. The flower was to be worn on the lapel of the coat, or snuggled into the fur at the throat. A more unsuitable gift could not have been chosen for the hard-visaged Miss Abigail. The lady herself realized this fact as she contemptuously passed it on to Sarah, the maid. But Miss Eliza, lover of pretty things, seized on hers, and for the next minute or so thought sorrowfully of Fred's little girl.

Chérie glanced again toward the window, attracted by the clicking of hail against the glass. They would have a white Christmas this year! Her thoughts flew to the farmhouse where Dot and Dash lived. The snow would be in drifts about it. Dash had told her of one

storm when the snow was above the fences. She wondered what they were doing to-night and if they had received the little gifts she had sent them; a necklace of beads for the girl, and a baseball glove for the boy.

In the kitchen there was a barrel addressed to Miss Chérie Lawson. It had been delivered about an hour ago by an expressman. Across the burlap top was printed, "Not to be opened until Christmas Day," and "From the Brown Family," in black letters. What could it be that required a container so large? Dot and Dash must have helped pack it. What excitement there must have been in the big old-fashioned kitchen of the farmhouse! She could see the twins, now, with their red cheeks and round blue eyes, dancing about in their delight, eager to do anything and everything for their dear friend Chérie! How she wished they were really here, that she might thank them. A slight sound made her glance toward the hall. Nell was back at last. She was glad, for she was beginning to feel lonesome. If the maid had been still in the kitchen she would not have minded in the least, but she had left unusually early this evening, and the place seemed as silent as a tomb.

A prolonged ringing of the bell brought her to her feet. Who could that be? Not Nell. Nell had her key. She wouldn't ring like that, anyway. They had a little code they followed. Two sharp, short rings meant a member of the family had forgotten his or her key. This ringing had not ceased yet. It must be a messenger boy. No caller would be so insistent.

All these thoughts raced through her brain as she hurried along the hall to the door. As she placed her hand upon the knob, to turn it, a strange feeling of fear possessed her. For a moment she stood undecided,

then summoning all her courage to her aid, opened the door.

Without a word, two men waiting outside entered and quietly closed the door after them. Chérie stood terror-stricken. Who were they? What did they want? Oh, if Nell would only come!

"Be quiet, little girl, and we won't hurt a hair of your head," warned one in a low tone. Quiet? She couldn't utter a sound. Her voice seemed frozen in her throat as she stared at the pale face of the man. Strange as it may seem, she noticed something peculiar about his eyes. One was a dark brown—the other a bright blue!

"Say, this is no party!" growled the other. "Chuck her into that closet, and let's go to work."

Chérie felt herself forced back and thrust into the hall closet, where she fell among the hanging outdoor garments. Instinctively, she grasped at them to save herself, but she only succeeded in dragging them from their hooks, and sank to the floor, enveloped in their folds.

Faint with terror, she extricated herself after a few moments from the coats and capes about her and stood up to listen. She pressed her ear to the door but could hear nothing. What were they doing? What did they want? Then, after what seemed to be an interminable length of time, she heard voices without, and shrank back into the depths of the closet as a dazzling light came through the opened door, almost blinding her.

"You can come out now," said one, in a gruff tone, "but don't try to give an alarm, or it'll be the worse for you. Remember you'll be watched! Don't try it." The next moment she heard the banging of the kitchen door. They were gone! She was again alone.

The telephone! She would call up the office! She would alarm the house, at once! Breathlessly, she reached the table. Pushing aside the pink-flounced doll adorning it, she grasped the telephone in her trembling hands. She could get no answer. What was wrong? She glanced down uneasily, and noticed the dangling green cords. They had been cut. No wonder it was so silent. The connection was destroyed.

Mechanically, she placed the gay pink lady back, and turned away. A key grating in the lock made her look toward the door, and she encountered Nell's bright eyes. There was amazement in their depths.

"What's wrong, Chérie?" she cried, fear taking possession of her. "You look like a ghost!"

"Oh, Nell, I am so glad you have come! I am so afraid . . . so afraid . . ." faltered Chérie, in a voice that sounded strange even to herself.

Nell dropped her parcels and rushed to her cousin as she sank on the chair by the telephone table. "Why, Chérie, what has happened? What has frightened you so?"

"Two men have stolen . . . I do not know, Nell. They locked me in the closet. I could see nothing," sobbed Chérie, completely unnerved now by the relief of her cousin's presence; throwing her arms about Nell, and leaning her aching head against her shoulder.

"There, there, don't cry!" soothed Nell, patting her lovingly. "Don't you care about it. You're O. K. and that's all that matters. Did you call up the office, Chérie?"

"No. They cut the cords, Nell," answered Chérie.

"Can you beat it?" cried Nell, angrily. "Well, I'll go down to the office and give the alarm."

"Oh, no, no, you must not go!" panted Chérie,

tightening her hold. "He said he would watch me . . . that no alarm was to be given. You must not go, Nell, they might hurt you."

A troubled look crept into Nell's eyes. Chérie was right. It was wise to be cautious. "I'll not go, Chérie," she promised, "but let us see what damage has been done."

The two girls went down the hall, timidly glancing into the rooms as they passed; noting with dismay the opened boxes, the pulled-out drawers. Everything was disarranged. Evidently nothing had been overlooked by these visitors in their quest for valuables.

Even in the kitchen things had been tossed about, part of the burlap being ripped from the top of the barrel. They had been interrupted here. By what? Nell caught her breath and pressed Chérie's arm, as a dark figure was silhouetted on a blind not three feet from the window they were facing. That was it! The same figure and the proximity of the kitchen in the next apartment had threatened them with danger! But what had been danger to the burglars was safety to the girls.

"I'll call for help!" cried Nell, throwing up the sash.

"What's the matter?" came a man's voice from the opposite window, as the shade shot to the top.

"We've been robbed!" Nell told him. "Will you telephone to the office for us? Our wires have been cut and I'm afraid to go down."

"What do you know! No, don't leave your apartment," he advised, "I'll telephone at once."

In less than an hour Mr. and Mrs. Brooks were with them. The superintendent had telephoned the theater and had them paged, before notifying the police. So Nell and Chérie were not alone when the

detective came, armed with authority to investigate. The loss couldn't be fully ascertained, at once, but all the neatly tied packages were gone. The Brooks family faced a giftless Christmas.

The detective interviewed each in turn; questioning Chérie again and again. All she could tell was of the two men who rang the bell for admittance, and that one had a pale face and eyes that did not match.

"What do you mean by eyes not matching?" asked the detective.

"I mean that one was blue and the other was brown," she answered.

"That's a clue," admitted the detective, "but what beats me is how they reached the elevator unchallenged."

"That's just what I'd like to know," growled Uncle Bob, glaring at the superintendent, who had been coming in and out all evening.

"I assure you, Mr. Brooks, every precaution is taken ——"

"But the fact remains that a tenant has been robbed," interrupted Uncle Bob, grimly. What was the use of talking? In his heart he was more than thankful to find Nell and Chérie unharmed. The relief that he and his wife felt when they beheld the girls safe and sound, after whirling home to they knew not what, dwarfed their other losses into insignificance. Christmas Day, of course, would seem bleak after the expectations of the past few weeks, but that couldn't be helped now.

"Make a list of the things to-morrow, Mr. Brooks," said the detective, preparing to leave. "That will be time enough."

"Very well," agreed Mr. Brooks, "I'll have it ready for you before noon."

"Suits me down to the ground, Mr. Brooks! . . . Good night!"

"Good night!"

Robert Brooks closed the door after him, heaving a profound sigh of relief as he turned toward the dining room, where the others were waiting. Well, that was that! Thank heaven it was over. He hoped his wife would feel no ill-effects from the anxiety, the excitement, and the strain of the past few hours. "My poor Lottie, she's far from strong," he thought, sadly; "sometimes, I fear . . ."

" 'Twas the night before Christmas!" Nell was reciting, as he entered, much to the amusement of her mother and Chérie. No wonder they laughed—her impersonation of a would-be elocutionist was so very droll.

"And all through the house ——" she went on.

"Creatures—and then some more creatures—were stirring," interrupted her father, mimicking her tone.

Nell laughed. "Yes, and visions of burglars, not sugar plums will dance through our heads to-night!"

"Oh, I hope not," sighed her mother. "We all need rest so much."

"I'll say we do," declared Nell, emphatically, "after such an experience as we've been through . . . I'll say so!"

CHAPTER XII

The Christmas Turkey

AND Christmas Day dawned clear, with the cold brightness of freshly fallen snow in heaped-up drifts in the streets, on the house-tops, and in and on every available spot where it could force itself or find a resting place. The storm was over! The Storm King had ridden on to wreak his fury elsewhere, leaving all this glistening whiteness behind him, the disposal of which would cost the City of New York thousands and thousands of dollars. Father Knickerbocker had received a Christmas present in the shape of a problem.

Not that Chérie thought of this, standing with red parted lips, and misty dark eyes, gazing at the scene spread before her, fascinated. Her thoughts were of the loveliness of this wonderful picture, framed by the sash of her bedroom window. A picture in pink-tinged white, scintillating under the reddish gold of the rising sun, with heaven's own blue above.

"Oh, it is beautiful!" she murmured. "Some day I shall do it . . . with snow . . . and that sky. . . ."

Chimes from the church, farther down the block, startled her. Turning, she glanced at the small white clock on the dressing table.

"Thou snail!" she exclaimed, shaking an admonishing finger in its direction. "Now I must hurry, hurry."

A few minutes earlier, she had awakened with a sense of calamity upon her, and for the space of a

second or so had searched her brain for the cause. The burglary! Christmas Day, and all the presents gone! Nell would never wear the silk scarf she had so carefully selected for her—just the blue of her eyes. She glanced at her sleeping cousin, her cheeks flushed pink, her golden hair shining against the white of the pillow. How pretty she was! How sweet!

And so her thoughts ran on, as she hurriedly dressed for church—so hurriedly, in fact, that she was much surprised to find, on her return, that her little black dress was wrong side out!

"Oh, let me turn it," said Nell, when Chérie noticed it, "and then your good luck will not be spoiled." And suiting the action to her words, she turned the dress.

Chérie laughed. How small the world! How closely allied the nations! She had heard Nanette say the same thing, once, when she came to breakfast in like fashion—and that was in Paris, during the last week she had spent there before sailing. Nanette had told her it was an old notion. "Nothing to such nonsense," —but she had insisted on turning the dress! Dear Nanette, how kind she had been to her! Especially that last week, when her whole household did homage to the sad-eyed little girl who would soon be on her way to a strange land across the sea—as if she had been a princess and not a pauper. Oh, she could never, never, never forget Nanette!

"Everything is at sixes and sevens this morning," grumbled Mrs. Brooks, in a disconsolate tone at the breakfast table, glancing at the other members of the family.

"I'll say it is," assented Robert Brooks, pushing aside his plate of cakes, underdone and leathery, so

different from the light, appetizing golden brown discs Martha usually brought.

For Martha had been up very late the night before, helping her sister trim the Christmas tree for the children, and she felt anything but energetic this morning. And when she heard of the burglary! "Well, you could buy me for two cents, I'm that disappointed! I know they had something for me! And I hope they soon find the thieves!" she confided to her sister that evening, watching her small nephews and nieces romp about their tree, bright with many-hued electric bulbs. The bulbs she had contributed herself, and found as much enjoyment in them as the children.

"I suppose Martha's presents went with the rest," remarked Mr. Brooks, inclining his head slightly toward the kitchen as the door swung closed after the maid.

"Of course, Daddy," said Nell, "everything that looked like a gift was taken. There's nothing but that barrel in the kitchen, and the dress mother had made for Chérie. And the dress was to be such a wonderful surprise! I had to go alone to the dressmaker's, so Chérie wouldn't have the faintest suspicion about that particular present."

"A dress for me!" exclaimed Chérie, glancing across the table at Aunt Lottie, excitement in her tones, her eyes shining.

Mrs. Brooks smiled. She was pleased that something had been left to be admired and discussed. "Yes, my dear, a dress for you, and I hope you'll like it. I found it on the floor as I came through the hall, last night . . . I suppose Nell dropped it there in the confusion."

"Right-o!" ejaculated Nell. "And do you know I

never thought of it again? I must be the possessor of a one-track mind."

"Keep it on the track of the dress for a minute," teased her mother, "and let us have a look at it. You'll find the parcel still unopened on the davenport in the living room."

A few moments later Nell stood in the doorway, holding up the dress for inspection. Chérie arose slowly, her eyes fastened on the glistening silk, and her breath came so fast that it was almost a sob. That beautiful shining thing was hers! Never had she seen anything so lovely!

"You see, Chérie, I had your graduation in mind," continued Aunt Lottie, touched a little by Chérie's evident admiration. "And besides," she went on, "white is as much mourning as black."

"Oh, what shall I say?" faltered Chérie, going around the table to Mrs. Brooks and kissing her. "I love it, and I love you! But I am selfish . . . I am the only one who has a gift!"

"Well, here it is," cried Nell, "the one and only survivor of its kind! So take it!" And she tossed the dress to Chérie, who caught it, and pressed it against her lips.

"Now how about the barrel, Chérie?" queried Uncle Bob, with a glint of mischief in his eyes. "What do you suppose is in that?"

"Yes, how about that?" laughed Nell, "the barrel is Chérie's property, too! She's the only one who draws a prize this morning."

A startled cry made them turn. And there in the doorway of the white-tiled kitchen stood Martha, grief-stricken, helplessly wringing her hands, her head moving from side to side.

"What's the matter now?" demanded Robert

Brooks, going to her. What had happened? Had she hurt herself? Was the kitchen on fire?

Mrs. Brooks could only gaze despairingly at her hitherto unemotional maid, expecting she knew not what, and the girls waited breathlessly.

"Oh, the turkey—the turkey ——" she gasped, "the turkey . . ."

"The turkey? What's wrong with the turkey?" Amazement compelled Mr. Brooks to stop and stare at her. What did she mean?

"Oh, I don't know, sir . . . I can't tell you."

"You can't tell me . . . why?"

"Because it's gone, sir! The turkey . . . is gone."

"Gone, Martha?" exclaimed Mrs. Brooks, in dismay.

"Oh! Can you beat that?" wailed Nell. She threw herself into a chair, and covered her face with her hands. It was the last straw! "I think they are the meanest burglars I ever heard of! To steal our Christmas turkey!"

That was it! The burglars had helped themselves to the turkey. An angry flush spread over Robert Brooks' face as he followed Martha to the refrigerator. The door was wide open. The turkey was *gone!*

"It's gone. There's no mistake about that," growled Mr. Brooks, gazing into the chill whiteness of the compartment that had been reserved for King Turkey. "And I suppose it was all ready for the oven?"

"Oh, yes," answered Mrs. Brooks, "we prepared it yesterday."

"Umph!" he ejaculated in disgust. "It's beginning to look like a restaurant dinner for ours, to-day, old girl, and you know what I think of that."

"What can't be cured must be endured, Robert.

We'll manage to exist on a restaurant dinner for once."

Nell's face lengthened. Visions of the well-browned bird passed tantalizingly before her mind's eye. What a thing to happen! And a little desperately she glanced about, wondering if there was a way out. Presently her eyes rested on the barrel with its disarranged burlap covering. What was in that barrel, anyway?

"What's the matter with that other present of yours, Chérie?" she asked, abruptly, "why don't you open it?"

"I—I ——" stammered Chérie, surprised. "Uncle Bob, please, will you open it for us?"

Mr. Brooks turned and put his hand on the barrel. "Get me a chisel and a hammer, Martha," he said, looking under the torn burlap, "and I'll open it. We can't afford to overlook any bets this morning, my friends."

Very patiently, he extracted the brads that held the strong covering in place; and silently they watched him as he worked.

"Oh, red apples, Daddy!" exclaimed Nell, excitedly, as the top layer was exposed to view. "And what fine ones!"

"Hand me a dish, and I'll get them out of my way. There is something else underneath. This is getting interesting!"

The apples, rosy and large, soon reposed on the kitchen table, and Robert Brooks was bringing forth from the depths of the barrel pears, nuts, plums and grapes.

"Your friends are generous," remarked Aunt Lottie, noting with pleased surprise the celery and other vegetables, scrubbed until they fairly shone, which

Mr. Brooks was still taking out and handing to Martha. "I think this is a wonderful present."

Chérie thought so, too. What a splendid idea to send such a gift! Nothing could be nicer, when one stopped to consider that everything in that barrel came from the farm itself. Any one could buy a gift according to his means—but this represented no mere money outlay—it represented the work of their own hands, and the choicest of their harvest, sent as a token of love.

"Daddy," said Nell, "you are beginning to look like the man we saw at the circus, who took rabbits and things out of a silk hat. Ladies, your kind attention," she went on, in a solemn tone, turning to the others. "Watch this marvel: he is apt to produce anything, from a needle to an anchor, from that wonderful barrel!"

In the laugh that followed her father joined. "All jokes aside," he told them, "there is something strange here, in this place separated so carefully from all the rest. Let us see what it is."

And again he wrenched away boards, and pried the brads from burlap, drawing forth, to the amazement of all, a great turkey! A turkey fit for any table, most deliciously browned, and gay with white, fluted frills about his neck, legs and wings.

Silently, Mr. Brooks placed it on the table, amidst the fruit and vegetables; and silently, they all stared at it, too astonished for words.

CHAPTER XIII

Nell Turns Detective

AS USUAL, Nell was first to recover herself. "Well," she sighed jubilantly, "it looks as if old Santa Claus is still working . . . and just when we needed it, too!"

"And it is in perfect condition," observed Mrs. Brooks, examining the big bird closely, a note of satisfaction in her voice.

"It ought to be," chuckled her husband. He was delighted. The much-dreaded "away-from-home" dinner was fading in the distance. "I never saw anything better packed. That contrivance to keep the turkey in place was simply great."

Chérie said nothing. A far-away look had crept into her eyes. She no longer saw the big brown turkey. She was living over again all the happenings of that wonderful Sunday morning. She could hear Aunt Abigail telling her never to come back to the old Greenwood mansion, if she defied her and went to church. How she had asked God to help her! And the fog! How frightened she had been! And out of it all had come dear little Dot and Dash, whose father used to send telegrams before he was a farmer! Dot and Dash, in the high-seated wagon, driving old Jack through the fog, relying absolutely on the instinct of this rather decrepit animal. And how Pop and Mom Brown had welcomed her, calling her a friend of the twins. Oh! She could never forget such kindness, such love!

"Chérie," called Nell, and Chérie came back to her surroundings with a start, "tell me where you were . . . miles away from little old New York, weren't you?"

"Yes, Nell," admitted Chérie, the color deepening in her cheeks. "I was with the Browns in the old farmhouse."

"I knew it," laughed Nell, lovingly patting her cousin's pink-flushed face, "and I don't blame you. I'll tell the world they're the right kind of people to know!"

"I'll say so," chimed in Uncle Bob, "never was anything better timed! Just think if any accident had happened to that precious barrel! Now we'll have our Christmas dinner at home after all—eh, old lady?"

"Yes," answered Aunt Lottie, placing her arm about Chérie, "and we can thank this little girl. You know it was her present."

"That's so," agreed Uncle Bob, heartily, "we don't want to lose sight of that fact."

"I should say not," declared Nell. "No Chérie, no dinner!"

Chérie felt embarrassed. She had done nothing. It was the Browns should be thanked.

"Well," observed Robert Brooks, glancing at his watch, "we'll leave the rest and the kitchen to Martha. I must make out that list for the detective, and I need all the help you can give me. So, let us get busy—he'll be here before noon."

The day following was bitterly cold. For an hour, tiny flakes of snow had been slowly falling past the window. Chérie looked out every now and then, though without taking any notice of the indications of a coming blizzard. Her mind was absorbed in the letter

she was writing. A letter of thanks to the Browns for the wonderful gift they had sent to surprise her. And what a surprise it had proved . . . and what a blessing!

"Christmas Eve two men came," she wrote, "and stole all our gifts. They left nothing for any of us but the barrel you sent me. That they did not open for some reason, and only tore some of the covering from the top. They even took our turkey from the refrigerator, and we could not have eaten our dinner at home on Christmas, if that beautiful bird filled with nuts, was not hiding in the barrel, so gay and so brown. How we enjoyed him!"

How excited the twins would be over the news contained in this letter! Dash blustering defiance of the burglars, and Dot shrinking, a little timidly, against her mother, glorying in her brother's bravery. And their eyes would grow larger and bluer as Pop and Mom discussed it under the light of the kerosene lamp, placed in the center of the red-checked cloth, that was always put on after supper when the table was cleared, and the dishes, washed and shining, arranged in their accustomed rows in the old-fashioned, painted cupboard in the corner of the kitchen.

"I wonder if Nell has returned," said Chérie to herself now as she arose from the desk. "I can hear nothing in this room."

But out in the dining room, enveloped in the smoke of his cigar, Uncle Bob was still alone. Aunt Lottie and Nell would be here soon, surely. The friend they had gone to see must have insisted that they stay and drink tea with them. "She usually has a tea-fight on," Nell had confided before leaving, "and how I detest them!"

She crossed to the window without disturbing

Uncle Bob, who looked so comfortable reading in his big chair. It was still snowing, and men passing along the street had their coat collars turned up. It must be cold, yet how warm and cheerful this room! She sank on the window seat and leaned back against the gay, heaped-up cushions, watching Martha arrange the dessert on the serving table for the evening meal. Presently she would spread the cloth and allow Chérie to aid her. Martha was more agreeable than Sarah, and welcomed any help the girls gave her with smiles.

It had been reported during the day that two other robberies had occurred in the building, and detectives were stationed in and around the place. But no trace of the thieves had been found, not a clue was forthcoming. It was discouraging, to say the least of it, not only to the people most concerned but to the police as well.

Yesterday, Uncle Bob had given the list of the missing articles to the detective when he called for it. "I think that's about everything," he had told him, handing him the well-filled slip of paper.

"The sooner we get the men, the better chance you have of recovering this property," remarked the detective, glancing at the many itemized valuables. "But they work fast, and dispose of their loot as quickly as possible, prying out the jewels, and throwing away the gold, which is so easily traced."

Chérie had seen the list. She knew that the wrist watch was intended for her. A tiny thing, octagon-shaped, with small diamonds about the face. Nell had described its beauties to her, and left her disconsolate after the telling. Uncle Bob and Aunt Lottie had selected it for her as their gift. Oh, what a pity! And the diamond and sapphire dinner ring for Aunt Lottie . . . the pearl necklace for Nell. . . .

The opening and closing of a door interrupted Chérie's thoughts. She glanced up, and saw Nell, followed by her mother, enter the room. Nell's cheeks were flushed, and her blue eyes sparkled with emotion. Chérie wondered if the thieves had been caught.

"Now, Nell," urged her mother, "tell us all about it. You've been so mysterious that I feel nervous!"

Robert Brooks looked up, questioningly, first at his wife, and then at his daughter, letting his paper rest on his knees.

"But you were fine, Mother," commended Nell, gazing proudly at her. "You never said a word when I whispered, hushing you for fear we'd be noticed——"

"Was there ever such a girl?" asked Mrs. Brooks, glancing about helplessly; "haven't we had mystery enough for one day?"

"Nell, stop your nonsense," ordered her father, "and tell us what happened."

"But I must begin at the beginning, Daddy," expostulated Nell, "so you will have to be patient."

"And the beginning was——" suggested her father.

"Only a few minutes ago, as we were getting on the elevator—and I feel *sure* there is no mistake——"

"Eleanor!" Mrs. Brooks was plainly exasperated. "Will you go on with your story?"

"Well," commenced Nell, rather hurriedly, "just as we were about to step on the elevator, I saw a man whisper something to the elevator boy. The boy caught my eyes on him, and said something to the man in return which seemed to anger him. Then the man turned, and he had one blue eye and one brown!"

Chérie started, gazing in a bewildered manner at

her cousin. The quizzical expression in Robert Brooks' eyes changed to amazement. Mrs. Brooks sank down on a chair beside him.

Nell was thrilled. She had the full attention of the audience at last. This was her moment and she would make the most of it.

"When I saw his eyes, I thought of the burglar at once," she went on, "but I never batted an eyelid. I pretended I was looking past him."

"Was—was it the burglar, Nell?" faltered Chérie. All the pretty rose color had receded from her cheeks.

"I don't know, Chérie. That's all there was to it. There may be other men with mismatched eyes in this world, but it was strange to see two such men in this particular building within two days."

CHAPTER XIV

The Arrest

"THAT'S a regular Sherlock Holmes' deduction, Nell," said her father, his shrewd eyes on his daughter, his brows drawn together, "but what made you notice the man? Any one is liable to ask information from an elevator boy."

"I know," answered Nell. "I can't really say why I noticed him. There was no reason for it or about it. . . . I just did, Daddy, that's all."

"I see, I see," assented Robert Brooks, going from the room into the hall, a set look about his mouth. Apprehensively, Chérie watched him. What was he going to do? Would he look for the man and find him? Would she again be confronted by the burglar? She shivered and glanced about, as if seeking an escape.

"What's the matter, Chérie?" asked Nell anxiously, noticing the fear in Chérie's dark eyes. "Don't worry—Daddy wants to get the police by telephone."

And then came his voice, saying, "Give me Police Headquarters." He was about to submit the clue to the proper authorities. It was the business of the guardians of law-abiding citizens to find out what it was worth. It might be valueless, but nothing must be overlooked that might lead to the capture of the burglars.

At dinner, the conversation began and ended, and began again, with the man in the elevator as the subject. How could he be a friend of the elevator boy and be a thief? The boy had been a trusted employee

for a year or so. It wasn't likely that he would help any one to rob the tenants. The boy had always been so obliging, so courteous. Still . . .

"Such things have happened before," observed Mr. Brooks.

"Oh, I can't believe it," persisted Mrs. Brooks, "not in this case. The boy is honest. I have had many little money transactions with him since we've been here. I'm afraid Nell has only found a mare's nest, and we'll have to search farther afield for these very clever burglars."

Nell's mouth drooped. She had been so elated at the recognition of her detective work, that she had given full swing to her thoughts. In her mind, by this time, the men had been arrested, tried, and sentenced. And now, to have her theories smashed like this with the power of her mother's argument, proved exasperating as well as disappointing.

"What's the trouble, Nell?" asked her father, teasingly, reading his daughter's thoughts like an open book. "What have I told you about jumping at conclusions? If Chérie had been with you, it would be an entirely different situation, but as it stands . . . well, we are only guessing. . . ."

"And guesswork doesn't get one anywhere," assented Nell, smiling, but still somewhat crestfallen.

Her father laughed, and playfully pinched her cheek, as he passed back of her chair. "Don't give up the ship like that, Nell! Who knows? You may be right, after all."

A few hours later, the detective came with the news of the thieves' capture.

"You see," he added, "we followed up that clue you sent us over the telephone, Mr. Brooks. Of course,

the first thing to do, was to get after the elevator boy. So we arrested him at once, and questioned him."

"And what had he to say for himself?" queried Robert Brooks.

"Not much, at first," was the detective's answer, "but after he knew we had him dead to rights, he became talkative. They all do."

"Did he confess his share in the burglary?"

"Surest thing you know, Mr. Brooks," laughed the detective. "He told all he knew to save his own skin. He said that Mr. Brown-and-Blue-Eyes was the leader. Anyway, it was this fellow who approached the boy, promising him untold wealth if he would join the gang."

"Can you imagine such a thing," remarked Mrs. Brooks, indignantly, "tempting the poor boy in that manner?"

"It was pretty raw," went on the detective, "but it's being done every day. The boy said he hesitated because stealing was against his conscience. He had been brought up to respect law and order by his good mother, but greed got the better of him and he finally consented. There was no risk in the work he had to do. Simply to give all the information he could about the tenants, and to pay special attention to their outgoings and incomings. That was all, except taking any member of the gang up in the elevator without question, at any time of the day or night."

"Were they straight with him?" asked Robert Brooks, much interested. "Did they give him his share, as they promised?"

"He said not. It seems they had the loot stored for a grand division after the holidays, and each member was then to get his share. And he told us just where it was, and how to get there. So we went as directed.

The stolen articles have been found. They were in a squalid room, in a downtown tenement house, piled in little heaps about the place; and Mr. Brown-and-Blue-Eyes, and his companion in crime, were caught gloating over their treasure."

"The thieves are arrested, too?" exclaimed Mr. Brooks, rising in excitement, while Mrs. Brooks and the girls gave surprised ejaculations. They would have their Christmas presents!

"They were caught like rats in a trap," chuckled the detective, "and there wasn't a shot fired. It was certainly great!"

"Oh, I am so glad they had not disposed of our things," exclaimed Mrs. Brooks, fervently. "I am so anxious to see my ring."

"And my pearls," chimed in Nell, "and Chérie's watch! I hope they are not among the missing."

"Missing?" repeated her mother, nervously, turning again toward the detective. "Didn't you say that all the articles were recovered?"

"Well, my dear lady, we recovered all that was in that room," he answered, "but who can say what has been already disposed of, before we got there?"

"That's so," acquiesced Mr. Brooks. "I suppose we may count ourselves fortunate to get anything back."

"When shall we know?" demanded Mrs. Brooks, glancing at each of the girls, in turn, sympathetically. She was sorry that they were to be deprived of their gifts.

"You can claim your property any time, now," the detectives told her; "everything is at Headquarters."

"Just a minute," said Mr. Brooks. "I'll be right

with you. The quicker we know where we stand the better."

An hour had passed. An hour of tedious waiting, and then Robert Brooks came back; but all he had with him of the many articles stolen, he carried easily in his overcoat pocket.

"Where are all the things, Daddy?" asked Nell, dimly conscious of a peculiar sensation about her heart. "Couldn't you carry them?"

Her father shook his head. "They weren't there to be carried," he remarked, grimly, placing on the table a ring, a wrist watch, and a string of pearls. "This is all that I could claim."

Silently they gazed at the glistening heap of jewels, wondering why they had been spared.

"I suppose the less valuable articles were in their way," continued Mr. Brooks, "and they got rid of them, at once . . . probably never brought them near that room, at all."

"I should like to know what was the turkey's fate," cried Nell. "I suppose they sold that, too."

"No. The police found the bones under the bed," returned her father. "They had it cooked in some oven, evidently, and enjoyed their Christmas dinner as well as the most righteous."

"Well, can you beat it? Wouldn't you think they'd have choked on it?" queried Nell, in her droll way.

"Here are your pearls, Nell . . . and Chérie's watch," and Mrs. Brooks handed the gifts to the girls; adding, "I hope you like them, my dears! . . . as I do my ring!"

Robert Brooks smiled, happy in the pleasure of those about him; his kind eyes reflecting their delight in the presents he had selected so carefully.

"Poor Uncle Bob has nothing," murmured Chérie, "and—and——"

"Oh, Daddy doesn't mind a little thing like that," interrupted Nell, laughing, "Daddy is just out of luck, that's all!"

CHAPTER XV

Chérie Enters High School

A MONTH passed. A month of hard work for Chérie. A wonderful month, that had given her the opportunity of bringing out the best within her, by application and concentration. And to-night, she was to reap the reward. To-night, she was to receive the stamp of approval from the powers-that-be in the form of her diploma, ribbon-tied, in gold and blue.

After that she would be with Nell at the "Girls' High." Could there be any greater happiness? She didn't think so. The fact that her cousin was now in the last half of her second year, and that she would be only a "freshie," mattered not at all. Why should it? Wouldn't they journey together, back and forth, and be in the same building, all day? Who could wish for more?

All these thoughts flashed through her brain, standing there before the mirror in the pretty room, trying to fasten a rose on her white silk frock. But as often as it was fastened, just so often did it slip away.

"Dear me!" she murmured, in chagrin, "I haven't Nell's 'fairy-fingers.' "

"Step on it, Chérie! We'll be late!" came a voice from the doorway. "It's almost eight, now."

"Oh, I am so glad you are here, Nell," cried Chérie in relief, nodding and smiling at her cousin's reflection in the glass. "You are what they say, Johnny with the spot, to me."

Nell laughed. "Johnny on the spot, you mean," she

corrected, crossing to Chérie's side, "but a preposition here and there is nothing in your young life, my dear little cousin."

Chérie turned and faced her. "This flower, Nell . . . you know how it should go . . . I can do nothing with it."

Nell took the rose, a thing of silk and velvet, and deftly fastened it, gazing the while at the girl, standing so slim and straight before her; at the satin-smooth head, the lustrous eyes, and the sweet, red-lipped mouth.

"You are lovely in white, Chérie," she said, earnestly. "You should wear nothing else."

And a great many others thought her the embodiment of youth and beauty that night; applauding her as she came forward on the platform. And the sudden burst of applause made the stereotyped smile on the bland face of the principal broaden; and he, impressively, gave into her keeping the neatly rolled diploma.

On the day following the commencement exercises, Chérie was to make her initial appearance in High School with Nell. But Nell had to attend her classes, and practically left her as they entered the building. "Go to the office, Chérie, and get your program," she had whispered before falling into line; and Chérie followed her cousin's advice. She was alone, but she was determined to swim, not sink, in these, to her, uncharted waters.

At first even the program was perplexing, and at odd times she would find herself in the corridors, wondering where to go next. But in a few days she became accustomed to the red-tape methods required to run an overcrowded school, and made her classes on time.

She studied diligently, and tried to do her best; but there were days when her best seemed mighty bad, judging from the dissatisfied glances and uncomplimentary remarks thrown at her by some of the exasperated teachers.

"Miss Smith called me dumb to-day," she told Nell, on their way home about a month later.

Nell was waving good-by to a couple of girls, but she immediately turned to look at Chérie. "Dumb?" she repeated, in surprise. "How could she call you dumb? . . . What did you say her name was?"

"Smith," answered Chérie; "we have her for Biology."

"Oh," ejaculated Nell, "I think I know the lady. She's the new one from up-state. And just why did she say you were dumb?"

"I do not know, Nell. I answered the question, and she said it was wrong . . . another girl gave the same answer, and she said it was right . . . and the girl laughed, closing one eyelid, so!" And Chérie very slowly winked one eye.

"Well, that's a good one, I'll tell the world," exclaimed Nell, amused by Chérie's illustration of the girl's action. "I don't understand it—but maybe she doesn't like you. 'The reason why, I cannot tell' sort of dislike. You've heard that jingle, haven't you, Chérie?"

"No," and Chérie shook her head, "what is it, Nell?"

"It goes something like this," said Nell, her eyes twinkling as she recited, with great expression:

"I do not like thee, Doctor Fell,
The reason why, I cannot tell,

But this, at least, I know full well,
I do not like thee, Doctor Fell."

"That's it!" exclaimed Chérie. "That must be just how she thinks of me."

"I wouldn't be surprised. Once in a while a teacher forms likes and dislikes, forgetting she should play no favorite. The only thing to do, Chérie, is not to notice it."

"But the girls said she gave me zero, Nell," faltered Chérie, her eyes filling with tears.

"And that's something else again, as the old delicatessen man remarks," declared Nell, a serious expression expelling the smiles from her lips, "she's out to get you, evidently."

Chérie was startled. "To get me?" she repeated, nervously. "What is that . . . to get me?"

"Oh, I mean that she may flunk you," explained her cousin. "You know she can on class work . . . even if you pass the test. You must have satisfactory class marks."

"I have," assented Chérie. "The girls said that also . . . and so I told you. I am a bother, Nell."

"You could never be a bother to me, Chérie. I'll do anything for you. . . . I'll even speak to Miss Smith, if you wish . . . perhaps I could explain things. . . ."

"No, no, Nell, don't!" pleaded Chérie. "That might make her angry. No, I'll work hard on my notes, to-night and surprise her."

CHAPTER XVI

Miss Smith

THE next day, Nell went to lunch as usual. She was alone, for Chérie's program gave her a different hour. The cousins did not like this arrangement, but could do nothing to alter it. It was so on the program, therefore as fixed as the laws of the Medes and Persians. Thoughts of Chérie came to her as she ate her solitary meal. Had her carefully prepared notes pleased Miss Smith? She hoped so. She was anxious to hear what judgment had been passed upon them.

A merry peal of laughter made her glance toward a nearby table. A group of girls were exchanging confidences as they munched their sandwiches and drank hot chocolate.

"I should worry what Miss Smith thinks of me!" declared one of them; a red-haired girl, with a tip-tilted nose, and a large, ever-smiling mouth, revealing pearly teeth. "Just an old crank, that's what she is!"

"Yes, but suppose she flunks you, what then?" demanded a dark-haired daughter of Italy, gravely. To her such a contingency would be a tragedy. The indifference of these American girls puzzled her. Surely, they were at school to learn all they could. If not why waste time?

The red-haired girl flashed a supercilious glance in her direction, and shrugged her shoulders. "I should still worry, Antonia," she said, emphatically, "even

if she did. Nobody cares about her. She's as mean as she can be."

Nell looked down at her plate. She had learned something. Miss Smith was unpleasant to all. Her dislike of Chérie, then, was not in any way special. She was glad. Now, she could disabuse her mind of that notion—a notion that would prove a handicap, and be very harmful to a girl as sensitive as Chérie.

"I heard some 'freshies' discussing Miss Smith to-day at lunch, Chérie," observed Nell, in a casual tone, that evening after dinner.

Chérie glanced up from the book she was reading, and gazed at her cousin in silence. To-day the Biology period had been a period of torture. Nothing pleased. Nothing was right. Even her notes had been returned to her, with a warning, advising improvement, written in red, across the first page. She had said nothing to Nell about it. She felt so depressed, she could not trust herself to speak on the subject, at all. What could she do? How would it end?

"They called her a crank. At least one girl did, and the others seemed to agree with her," continued Nell.

"What was the girl like, Nell?"

"Oh, she had red hair ——"

"And a great big smile?" interrupted Chérie, eagerly.

Nell laughed, saying, "That describes her, exactly."

"She is Mildred Jennings," Chérie informed her; "she also has lots of trouble ——"

"That's what I think, Chérie. They all have trouble, more or less, and get along as best they can. So brace up."

"But Mildred Jennings takes no notes, and never

answers one question. . . . If I did that, I would not blame Miss Smith."

"Neither would I," agreed Nell, thoughtfully.

The subject was dropped for the time being. Chérie made no more complaints. If she had any cause for dissatisfaction, she kept it to herself, and Nell was very busy with her own work, so busy that the trouble between Chérie and her Biology teacher faded from her mind.

To-day, Nell was deep in Geometry. There had been a test, and she had just finished. She was quite pleased with herself. She had answered every question, and was sure her answers were correct. She was leaning back to rest, waiting for her papers to be collected with the rest, when a messenger entered the room.

"Eleanor Brooks," said the teacher, raising her voice to attract the attention of the pupils, and without lifting her eyes from her desk. "You are wanted in the office."

Nell sprang to her feet and hurried out into the corridor. A vague fear had taken possession of her. What was wrong? Was her mother ill? She remembered suddenly that she had not seemed so well this morning. Or had anything happened to her father who was away on a business trip?

Her mind engrossed with these doubts and fears, it was no wonder that she was so completely surprised, on entering the office, to see Chérie and Miss Smith standing in front of the principal's desk. Why were they here? What had happened now?

"Eleanor Brooks," thundered the principal, peering at her from under shaggy brows, "is this girl your cousin?"

"Yes, sir," assented Nell, sending a questioning glance toward Chérie without success. Chérie's eyes

were on the principal, and the light of battle was in them. She knew the look on Chérie's face, she had seen it before. Whatever had happened Chérie would stand her ground. What was it that had so stirred her gentle cousin?

"And your father is her guardian?"

"Yes, sir," and Nell's knees shook under her. What was coming? She clenched her hands to steady herself.

"Then I must see him at once," he declared, tapping the desk with his fingers.

"My father is out of town," said Nell, "and will not be back for a week . . . he's away on business."

"Humph!" ejaculated the principal, pressing his lips together, tightly. . . . "Well, your mother will do. Tell her to be here, without fail, to-morrow morning, between ten and eleven."

Nell flushed. His tone was too peremptory. Who was he to order her mother to go, or to stay?

"Miss Smith reports that this girl has been insubordinate," he went on, in his heavy, pompous manner.

"Yes?" murmured Nell, turning her eyes toward Miss Smith, who glared at her in return through large, black-rimmed glasses. "What has my cousin done?"

"Enough, I assure you," retorted Miss Smith, sharply. "She refused to answer from the text-book, and threw it on the floor. Of course, for the time, class discipline was destroyed by her heroics."

"And on what was the lesson?" asked Nell, plainly puzzled.

"On the theory of evolution," said the teacher, coldly.

The principal started, a strange expression com-

ing into his eyes. Drawing his shaggy brows closer together, he gazed at Chérie, intently.

"Her work has never been ——" began Miss Smith.

The principal held up his hand. "Let the girl speak for herself, Miss Smith . . . I wish to hear what she has to say."

Nell glanced at her cousin, so erect and unafraid, and wondered what she could say to defend herself. To her the situation seemed hopeless.

"Why did you act in the manner described?" asked the principal of Chérie, not unkindly. "Did you not realize that you were guilty of insubordination?"

"No, sir. . . . I could not think . . . of anything, only the insult to God that was before my eyes . . . to God, who created us to love and serve Him, here, on earth, that we may be with Him, hereafter."

A silence that could be felt followed this declaration. Nell stared in a dazed way at this cousin of hers. Miss Smith sniffed, quite audibly, and the principal coughed.

"Ah—h—h!" he observed, recovering himself. "That is one of my contentions, Miss Smith. Different natures require different methods of treatment. Take this girl, for instance. She possesses a serious, reasoning mind. She either accepts or rejects. Therefore she has my permission to drop this subject."

"That is wise," bowed Miss Smith.

"Yes, I think so! And now, my dear child, you can take up any other subject in its place. . . . Miss Byron will attend to that for you. Run away and get it fixed up at once."

"Chérie, Chérie, Chérie!" murmured Nell, as they moved together along the corridor, "never in my life have I been so surprised ——"

Chérie looked at her gravely. For the moment she seemed years older and wiser than the Nell she loved.

"My cousin," she said, gently. "If you were a Catholic—and if you were being taught by our Sisters—you would understand! Oh, Nell, Nell, this way of learning things is so harsh, so cold! I wish ——"

She did not complete the sentence. Chérie could not be ungrateful, even in thought, to the dear people who had been so kind to her.

CHAPTER XVII

Chérie Hears from Dot and Dash

DAYS, weeks, a month passed. Chérie was happy again—so happy that she did not realize the flight of time. The scene in the office when she had been brought before the principal for insubordination, had ended her tribulations. The "jumbly-jock" of her school life had been removed. Miss Smith and her criticisms were of the past. No more did she awaken with an intangible dread hanging over her; a reluctance to begin the new day; fearing that something was about to descend upon her and crush her.

Everything was changed, now. The steady improvement in her work was noticed by her teachers. Miss Burns was delighted with her drawings. Recognizing the artist in this very satisfactory pupil, she had placed plate after plate on exhibition; hanging them on the walls of the classroom that all might see. This was embarrassing but not distasteful to Chérie. She liked the praise—for a reason. To her this commendation meant that the success she hoped for might be hers, sometime. After years and years of hard work, of course, but in the end she would reach her goal.

So it was no wonder that Chérie was happy. She could afford to excuse Miss Smith, who had made the first of the term so miserable. Why not? Only the other day, in the section room, a girl said, "Do you know, girls, that at times Miss Smith is quite deaf?" Deaf? Was that why she had said Chérie's answers were wrong? Was it possible that the teacher had not

heard her at all? Chérie knew her tones were low-pitched, that she did not speak very loud. Was that why Miss Smith had nodded approval to those with more strident voices?

Nell was dubious when Chérie spoke of this as a reason for Miss Smith's peculiar behavior. "Don't you believe it!" she said. "There was nothing wrong with her hearing that day in the office, I'll tell the world! She heard every word you said."

"She was so close to me . . . she had to hear. . . ."

"I'll say so," acquiesced Nell, nodding her approval as that scene was again before her. Chérie, with that rapt look upon her sweet face, standing so slim and unbending, facing her accuser and her judge; her only weapon confidence in God. Nell could never forget that. It was stamped on her brain forever. Surely, the martyred maidens of whom Chérie so often spoke, were like her cousin. They had suffered tortures and death rather than deny God. And so would Chérie. But that was ages and ages ago . . . and Chérie was living now. . . .

The weather was unusually fine for this time of year. In the parks and in the squares, throughout the city, tiny buds were on the trees. Easter would be here within the week, with its holidays, and Nell and her mother were planning little excursions to various near-by places to surprise Chérie. It would be such fun to hear her quaint little ejaculations of delight; to watch her eyes light up with pleasure at some wonderful bit of scenery.

So, to-night, after dinner, Nell found herself alone with her father, and seized the opportunity to acquaint him with their plans for the holidays. Idly he

puffed away, his eyes on the smoke-rings floating upward, listening as she talked.

"Don't like it a bit," he remarked, bluntly, shaking his head. "Too strenuous, Nell."

Nell gazed at him, dismayed, puzzled by his attitude.

"Why, Daddy, we thought it would be lovely. . . ."

"It would be—for you two youngsters, but how about your mother? You know, Nell, she comes first."

The dear mother hadn't been so well, lately. Even now she was snatching a few minutes' rest in her room—but after a while she would join them, and be as gay as ever. This thought brightened her, and she glanced again at her father.

"I know she's not strong, Daddy, just now. She has a cold, and that cough distresses her. . . ."

"That's it, Nell . . . it's the cold, I know. That is why I am sure a change would do her good. How would you like to go to Atlantic City?"

Nell gasped. Did he mean it? This was something she had never even dreamed of! "How would I like it?" she exclaimed, throwing her arms about his neck, while he laughingly tried to keep her from coming in contact with his lighted cigar. "What made you think of it? Does Mother know?"

"There, there, Nell, one question at a time, if you please. . . . Thank heavens, here's your mother, now!"

Mrs. Brooks, followed by Chérie, entered the room.

"What is it all about?" she asked, smiling at Nell's evident excitement.

"Ask your daughter—she'll tell you," teased Robert Brooks, "I'm almost strangled." And he felt his throat, tenderly.

"I didn't hurt you a bit!" Nell pouted. "I

wouldn't hurt any one kind enough to take us all to Atlantic City."

"Atlantic City?" repeated her mother, surprise in her tones. "What is she saying, Robert?"

"Just that," he told her. "I have arranged to take you and the girls there for a few days."

"Ah—h," murmured Mrs. Brooks, happily, "Atlantic City at Easter!" Then a little frown wrinkled her smooth forehead, and she glanced rather irritably at the smiling faces about her. What children they were! How little they thought of what really mattered!

"Now what's wrong?" demanded her husband, solicitously; quickly noticing her glance of perplexity. "Don't you care to go?"

"Yes," plaintively, "but what are we to wear? One cannot go in any old thing to such a place."

"I should hope not, my dear," acquiesced her husband. The expression of weariness in her eyes made his heart ache. "But don't overdo yourself."

To the girls the complaint uttered by Mrs. Brooks held no meaning. Their minds were elsewhere. By now, Chérie had a very fair knowledge of what Atlantic City stood for. Clothes were nothing to them. They were as unconcerned about their apparel as the "lilies of the fields."

"Children," said Mrs. Brooks, indignantly, a trifle irritated by the evident inattention of Nell, especially, "every one knows what Atlantic City is like at this season of the year . . . so we must have new clothes. . . ."

"Why the excitement, Lottie?" laughed her husband. "The stores are still doing business, aren't they?"

"But it is so late in the week," she objected, fret-

fully. "Everything worth while must have been bought up before this."

"You'll find something . . . leave it to you, my dear!" And Robert Brooks resumed his interrupted cigar.

"I suppose so," with a sigh of resignation. "As a rule I am very fortunate when I shop. . . ."

"The girls will be a help," he insinuated, wishing to cheer her flagging spirits.

"Help?" she said, dolefully. "Do you call two extra wills with different viewpoints helpful?"

"Not exactly," he agreed, glancing toward the two, still engrossed in their own conversation. "Why need you worry about anything like that? All they want is the trip."

Mrs. Brooks' eyes lighted up, and a smile played about her lips. "And they are right, Robert. Let us profit by this lesson of Youth and be happy, too. . . . I am just a fuss. . . ."

And they were happy. Talking and laughing, far into the night, about what they would see and do. And as Chérie listened to their merry banter, thoughts of the old life in Paris came into her mind. Again, she could see that one beautiful, glorious painting, her father's masterpiece, turned to the wall. The large canvas gleamed in the semi-darkness of a corner of that room, studio and living room in one, in which they had been so happy. Here they had planned the little sketching tours. She was to go always. The fresh air would be so good for her, their baby! And the small basket would be packed with a wonderful lunch to coax her rather uncertain appetite. They thought of her always, their little Chérie. And now, these dear friends were planning a trip, a most wonderful trip, very different from the poor little sketching tours into

the provinces. But the spirit was the same, and again she was conscious of the same feeling of happy anticipation, as they discussed the many pleasures to be enjoyed in that marvelous city by the sea.

The following morning, Chérie found a letter beside her plate addressed to herself in childish handwriting; the large rounded characters covering the entire surface of the bright pink envelope. Of course it was from either Dot or Dash, she knew at a glance. So, excusing herself to the others at the table, she opened it, eager to learn what the twins had to tell.

And what a letter it was! A letter brimming over with love for their friend Chérie; thanking her for the Christmas gifts she had sent, and expressing horror and bravado, in imperfect English, at the audacity of the Christmas Eve burglars. She smiled. All this sounded so like Dash. She turned the page and the following paragraph surprised her:

"Dot went with me into Oldville the other day, and we drove old Jack past your aunt's place. And just as we were going by a lady came out and got into a big car with a W on the side. And she said to some one in the car, 'Chérie Lawson isn't there, and they don't know where she is.' We would have told her where you are, but the car raced away like mad.

"And oh, Chérie, you won't believe it! But Dot went up the stoop and spoke to that Sarah woman! Wasn't she brave? She said she knew where you lived—and the Sarah woman told her to go away!"

"What's the matter, Chérie?" asked Nell, "you look a bit upset."

"Strange, Nell!" returned Chérie, a puzzled look in her dark eyes. "Read it and say what you think. It is from the twins."

Nell took the pink sheet from her cousin, and

glanced at the ink-smudged first page. "Nothing upsetting about this," she laughed, "it is very much of the earth, earthy."

"Read the other page, Nell," said Chérie.

"That's strange," remarked Nell, glancing up and encountering her mother's eyes upon her. "Read this paragraph, Mother, and see what you think of it."

CHAPTER XVIII

A Strange Letter

MRS. BROOKS smiled as she read, prepared for comedy from the redoubtable twins. But the little incident at the bottom of the page savored more of tragedy than comedy; and she looked her surprise as she handed the letter back to Nell. "That is rather cryptic, Nell," she observed, "we need a key."

"A key!" exclaimed Nell, "I believe I have it. Do you know, Chérie, that woman we met in Boston might do a thing like that. I mean the woman who owned the pearls you found in the department store. What was her name? . . . I can't remember it."

"Wolfson," said Chérie, staring at her cousin in astonishment. "Katherine Wolfson was the name on the check."

"Great Scott, that's it! That's what Dash said was on the car . . . the initial W. . . ."

"But why was she looking for me?" questioned Chérie.

"Don't ask me," retorted Nell, shrugging her shoulders. "Why did the Greenwoods say they didn't know where you were?"

"Well, that might be explained by your aunts' objections to all strangers," excused Mrs. Brooks, "and they can't be blamed for that . . . especially as they never even heard of your adventure in Boston."

"That's so," admitted Nell, "how could they know? Probably, they thought Mrs. Wolfson was a sneak

thief, and had extra locks put on the doors to protect the family silver."

Her mother smiled and arose from the table, urging the girls to get ready as soon as possible for the business of the day—shopping.

And so the subject was dropped, but Chérie's mind reverted again and again to the mysterious paragraph in the twins' letter. How strange it was! Why had Mrs. Wolfson sought her out? Evidently, the wonderful adventure was not yet ended.

"This, with the cape, is just the thing for Chérie, Mother," Nell suggested, "and the color is what you wanted."

Mrs. Brooks inspected the garment in question. "Try it on, Chérie," she said, pleased with the workmanship as well as with the goods; and Chérie, nothing loath, slipped her arms into the sleeves of the coat that the clerk was holding.

It was past one. They had lunched in one of the stores, and Mrs. Brooks was anxious to return home. So, without more ado, Chérie found herself the possessor of the very latest thing in wraps. To say she was delighted with it, and the other purchases that had fallen to her lot that day, is putting it mildly. She was as one in a dream. Would she awaken, presently, and find she had nothing? No, she was not asleep. Everything was real and she was so happy.

Owing to business, Robert Brooks found it impossible to leave New York before Monday.

"And I wanted to see the Easter parade on the boardwalk," grumbled Nell, "they say the gowns are marvelous."

"Well, it can't be helped," rebuked her mother. "You will have to be satisfied with Fifth Avenue."

"The very thing," exclaimed Nell, jubilantly.

"Chérie and I will go to the Cathedral . . . how is that, Chérie?"

"The Cathedral?" echoed Chérie.

"Why, St. Patrick's, of course," returned Nell, emphatically. "I want to see the fashionables parade and you want to go to church, and by going there, we'll both be satisfied. Don't you understand, Chérie? We can kill two birds with one rock."

Robert Brooks glanced at his wife, and laughed. "I think Nell is the original Miss Fix-it, Lottie," he said, teasingly.

Nell's cheeks reddened. "But Chérie likes the arrangement, Daddy, and it suits me. You do want to go, don't you, Chérie?" a little anxiously. Was there truth in her father's joke? Did she take too much upon herself where others were concerned? She hoped not. She didn't wish to be like that.

"Oh, oh!" exclaimed Chérie, clasping her hands together, "I shall love it, Nell . . . you think of such wonderful things, all the time!"

Another dream was about to come true for Chérie. She would pray in that magnificent edifice Nell had shown her only a few days ago. She would see how beautiful it must be within . . . she would see the Cardinal with his fine, gentle face, and hear the music . . .

CHAPTER XIX

An Old Acquaintance

ATLANTIC CITY! Chérie drew a deep breath of utter satisfaction. Oh, the delicious smell of salt in the air! How wonderful it was! She glanced up and down the boardwalk, and was conscious of a feeling of exhilaration. The gay throngs of well-dressed people; the gaudily decorated shop fronts; the theaters flashing the latest attractions in jeweled letters; the mammoth hotels; the piers ablaze with lights. Flags flying—bands playing—laughter everywhere.

She felt giddy from the splendor of it, and for a moment closed her eyes to steady herself. Then she turned and gazed at the restless ocean, stretching before her in gray-green, undulating vastness. The rollers, one upon the other, hurrying in to hurl their white, foamy cargo upon the beach below; leaving it to recede in dainty, lace-like patterns, to resume again its part in the never-ending game.

She looked about, wondering what was keeping Nell. Surely, by this time she had written cards to every one! No, she was still seated at a table, busily engaged. Chérie could see that much from where she stood on the boardwalk on which the novelty shop faced. Almost an hour had passed since she had helped her cousin select the cards to send to her numerous acquaintances. She, herself, had only sent two; one to Dot, the other to Dash. Afterwards she had wandered out here; preferring to wait for Nell

and enjoy the attractions of the great outside at the same time.

Yesterday, when they arrived at the hotel, they had had but time to dress for dinner. Afterwards they attended a vaudeville performance on one of the piers; so, although Chérie had been enchanted by the bright lights, and the jazz of the many orchestras, as they made their way through the crowds, her real delight was now; with the sun's rays gilding everything on land and sea, and the canopy of heaven's own blue above it all.

"Beg pawdon, miss, is yo' name Lawson?" came a voice, breaking in upon her thoughts.

She turned sharply, in surprise, and saw a colored man standing in a respectful attitude before her.

"Yes," she admitted, a little reluctantly, not understanding.

"Then the lady wants to speak to yo', miss," he informed her.

"The lady?" repeated Chérie, puzzled. "What lady?"

"The lady in that chair, miss," he replied, pointing to one near-by, the occupant or occupants of which could not be seen owing to its position on the boardwalk.

"Who is she?" she demanded, turning her gaze upon the man, wonderingly. "What is her name?"

"I don't know, miss," he answered, "but she's a guest at the hotel, and I was instructed to have my chair in readiness for her while she's here. That's all I know, miss."

Chérie drew back, doubtfully. Would she go? It was only a step or so to the chair, and it was broad daylight. She was not alone in this wide-awake, jostling crowd—and Nell was in the shop. She could

reach her in a few seconds—so she advanced a little timidly, and then gasped. This sweet-faced lady with such an erect carriage! Where had she seen her before?

"My dear, have you forgotten me?" she asked the next moment, and in that moment Chérie knew. Katherine Wolfson was gazing into her eyes.

"Oh!" she cried in excited tones, delight in her voice, "I am so glad to see you again."

"You are no happier than I am, Chérie," she returned, kissing the pink-flushed cheeks, turned so demurely in turn for each caress. "I was beginning to think that I would never find you. Come in here with me. We can talk as we ride."

"But—I—I am not alone," faltered Chérie, thoughts of Nell flashing suddenly through her brain. Nell would be frantic if she came out and found her gone! "My cousin is writing cards. . . . I could not leave . . ."

"Certainly not, Chérie," acquiesced Mrs. Wolfson. "Where is she? Can you not let her know, at once, and have her come with us? The chair will hold us all. Go, dear, I shall wait for you."

As Chérie turned toward the shop, Nell appeared in the doorway, anxiously looking this way and that, evidently searching for her cousin. Seeing her, Chérie darted toward her.

"What's the big idea . . . do you want to get lost?" complained Nell. "You frightened me, Chérie."

"I am so sorry, Nell," apologized her cousin, "but I was here . . . and it is daylight, and the sun is shining . . . so how could I be lost?"

Nell laughed. "Not very well, I guess, Chérie . . . but I'm with you from now on."

"Do you remember the lady whose pearls I found, Nell? Well, she wants us to ride with her."

"Here?" ejaculated Nell in surprise. "Where is she?"

"Over there," returned Chérie. "I left her to go to you . . . she is waiting for us to join her."

"But how did you meet her in all this crowd?" questioned Nell, her wonder-filled eyes on the surging mass of well-dressed people.

"She saw me and knew me. She was passing me. I did not see her, Nell . . . she sent the man for me." And Chérie lowered her voice. They were very near Mrs. Wolfson, now.

"And this is the cousin!" greeted Katherine Wolfson, smiling. "We were waiting for you, my dear. That is, to be more exact, Chérie made me wait for you . . . she refused to go without you. And I was only too willing, Nell."

Nell was charmed. What luck to meet her! How sweet she was! So friendly, so unaffected! A little later they were seated, one on each side of their hostess, rolling along the boardwalk. And how they enjoyed it! To the girls it was something new, and with sparkling eyes and smiling lips they conversed with Mrs. Wolfson, who tried to entertain and interest her young guests.

After a while, the amusement places became fewer, there was less noise, and still their chair rolled on.

"I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw you standing there, Chérie," observed Mrs. Wolfson, lovingly; "and I was so anxious to make sure! I could hardly wait for the man to come back."

"But, Mrs. Wolfson, how could you remember me? It is such a long time, since that day in Boston."

"I never forgot you, my dear . . . I never could,"

she answered quietly, and a far-away look crept into her eyes.

They talked on one subject after another. Presently, Chérie was telling her two listeners of her life in the old, shabby studio in Paris. What a story of love it was! The story of a happy little girl and her parents; the dear little French mother, and the splendid father, the American artist.

"And some day I shall be an artist, also," declared Chérie, crushing her hands together in the intensity of her resolve. "Some day I shall finish the masterpiece . . . and Frederick Lawson will be recognized at last!"

Mrs. Wolfson and Nell gazed at this new Chérie in utter amazement. What depth of feeling she possessed!

"Where is the masterpiece now, my dear?" inquired Katherine Wolfson, in her gentle voice.

"Monsieur le Curé has it," replied Chérie. "He is keeping it until I send for it . . . in his own house in Paris."

Mrs. Wolfson's jeweled fingers closed over Chérie's small hand, but she made no comment. How could she? What was there to be said? To realize her dead father's dream, this girl would sink her identity in his unfinished canvas.

It wanted but a few minutes of one, and luncheon was waiting. But Nell and Chérie had so much to tell of their meeting with Mrs. Wolfson, that Mrs. Brooks had evidently forgotten the time.

"And she was so lovely to us, Mother," went on Nell, "and she sent this to you and Daddy, inviting us to dine with her to-night."

Her mother read the delicately written note, and then gazed thoughtfully at the two girls. She was

sorry to disappoint them, but their time was so limited that acceptance seemed out of the question.

"I'm afraid I must decline," she said, slipping the sheet of paper back in its envelope. "I am sure Mrs. Wolfson will understand. . . ."

"But why, Mother?" interrupted Nell, pleadingly. "I know you would like her so much . . . and she thinks so much of Chérie. . . ."

"I'm sorry, dear," replied her mother. "But really I cannot. We have something planned for every hour left to us."

"Well, well, what's it all about?" quizzed Robert Brooks, entering the room at this moment, and noting the girls' perturbed faces. "Conference going on? . . . Am I intruding?"

"Oh, no, Daddy," and there was relief in Nell's tones. "We are only too glad you've joined us."

"Very well, I'm with you," he agreed, jokingly, "but remember I'm for the blue gown before you say a word."

"But the question is not one of gowns this time, Robert," observed Mrs. Brooks, smiling in spite of herself as the girls laughed; "we are discussing an invitation to dinner."

"Your mother is right," he declared, "we have mighty little time left." Everything had been explained to him, and giving up this last evening for a dry-as-dust dinner party was not to be considered at all. "However, there is a chance. If Mrs. Wolfson knew we wished to leave immediately after dinner, I am sure she would not object . . . and that would steal very little of our time. We must have dinner, and whether in this hotel or another, doesn't much matter."

"Oh, you darling!" cried Nell, joyfully. "I knew

you would straighten things out . . . you don't really mind, do you, Mother?"

"No," in a resigned tone, "I shall call up at once, and if Mrs. Wolfson agrees to such an arrangement, we will dine with her, to-night."

"Well, then, it's as good as settled," declared Nell. "Mrs. Wolfson will not refuse." And she smiled at Chérie, encouragingly.

"You were right, Nell," said her mother, hanging up the receiver, "she was, indeed, most charming about it."

And that evening, Mrs. Wolfson in black velvet and almost priceless point lace, and wearing the pearls that had been the means of bringing Chérie to her notice, awaited her expected guests in the living room of her suite in the great ocean-front hotel.

The minutes seemed to drag, and occasionally she glanced at the clock on the mantel. But it was not yet seven, the hour she had named in her note to Mrs. Brooks. She wandered into the dining room, and gazed critically at the table glistening with silver and crystal; rearranging the orchids and the shaded lights in a dozen different ways.

She was not herself to-night, and she knew it. She knew her meeting with Chérie this morning had upset her usual tranquillity. It had been such a surprise to see her standing there on the crowded boardwalk. And now she was conscious of a desire to appear at her best, that this girl might approve. Which was a peculiar state of mind for a woman of her wealth and prominence. A state of mind that it would be impossible to understand or analyze, unless one knew the great sorrow of Katherine Wolfson's life.

Five years before she had had a daughter, a lovely dark-eyed girl of sixteen, whom she almost idolized.

She had her loved one with her, always, at home or traveling. She thought no harm could come to her child when she was near. And yet they were together when the motor accident occurred that deprived her of her darling; leaving her to "carry on," until they met again in the great beyond.

Afterwards she never mentioned her daughter's name, and her friends commended her bravery. But silence was her refuge. To speak of her to others would only torture her, and make the aching want in her heart unbearable. And so she traveled and fought down her grief; interesting herself in many things to ameliorate the sufferings of others.

And then Chérie came into her life. She saw in those large dark eyes the same haunting expression that she thought belonged only to her daughter. It was strange, but the girl looked at her with her darling's eyes!

Try as she might she could not rid herself of the impression. She would like to see her again! But why? She was nothing to her. What did she care about her? But she did. At last the desire became an obsession. She motored to Oldville, and located the Greenwood mansion, only to meet with disappointment. Grim Miss Abigail refused any information concerning the whereabouts of her niece. And then to find her here. . . .

A slight noise made her glance toward the door, as it opened wide.

"Mr. and Mrs. Brooks, Miss Brooks and Miss Lawson," announced the man in livery; and Katherine Wolfson went forward to greet her guests.

CHAPTER XX

Chérie and Nell Receive a Surprise

IT WAS the morning following Mrs. Wolfson's dinner party. At the breakfast table, plans were being made for the disposal of the time until after lunch, as the train for New York left about two-thirty. Nell and Chérie were to do a little shopping in the various stores along the boardwalk, Mr. and Mrs. Brooks would go chair-riding, and would not return before noon. So the girls were free to use these few precious hours as they pleased. What could be more pleasant than to select pretty souvenirs of this delightful trip? Nothing pleasanter, to judge by their expressed appreciation, as each much-beribboned novelty caught their eyes.

"Just think, Chérie," groaned Nell, "this time to-morrow we'll be in New York. . . . This," motioning with her hand, "all this, will be left behind . . . others will be enjoying . . ."

"Oh, stop, stop, Nell," cried Chérie, covering her ears with the tips of her fingers; "don't say that now . . . we are still here! We can enjoy it!"

Nell laughed. Chérie was right! The joyous present was theirs, at least! So away with thoughts of the future! She turned her attention to a clam shell, artfully disguised with shirred silk and gilding; wondering if Martha would like it.

And then, apropos of nothing, she inquired, casually, "Isn't Mrs. Wolfson a dear, Chérie?"

Chérie's mind was on the highly colored balls,

trying to choose the most attractive; and she only caught the last word of Nell's query.

"Dear?" she repeated. "I think not, Nell. . . . I have seen others much dearer."

"Oh, you have? Where, pray?" demanded Nell, a trifle indignant. "I think she was wonderful, last night . . . and Mother and Daddy . . ."

"What are you saying, Nell?" The ball dropped from Chérie's hand as she turned perplexed eyes on her cousin. "I do not follow you! Who was wonderful?"

"Why, your friend, Mrs. Wolfson."

"I thought you said this ball was dear," returned Chérie, laughing, holding out the ball for Nell's inspection. "Do you like it? I want it for Dot."

"Buy it," advised Nell, "and relieve the mind of that clerk by paying for it at once. . . . I'm sure she thinks you only came in here to play with the balls."

"You're a tease, Nell," pouted Chérie, "I am sure she has no such thought. But you would say that!" Taking the ball she went to the cashier and paid her. "She said she would write to me," she remarked, as she turned from the window and found her cousin beside her, dropping the change she had just received into her handbag at the same time. "I hope she does not forget."

Nell lifted her eyebrows in surprise. "But you don't know her Chérie," she objected.

"Not know her? As well as you do," returned Chérie, a puzzled expression on her face.

"As I do," repeated Nell, her astonishment growing as she stared at the bespectacled young woman in the cage. "Why, I never saw that girl before in my life!"

"That girl?" echoed Chérie. "What girl, Nell? I spoke of Mrs. Wolfson."

"Well, what do you know?" exclaimed Nell, as she laughed merrily. "You caught me that time, little cousin. . . . That was tit for tat. But all jokes aside, Chérie; Mrs. Wolfson really likes you."

"She told me so, last night," confided Chérie, shyly, "and said I was like one she had loved much . . . who is now dead."

"Oh!" ejaculated Nell, gravely serious. "Maybe a sister . . . you know you hold your head up just as she does herself. So!" and Nell gave the little tilt to her head that was characteristic of Chérie.

"In that, too, I am like her beloved, she says," assented Chérie, nodding slowly; "and in my eyes."

"I suppose that accounts for her persistency about finding you?" remarked her cousin, musingly. "Such interest in a stranger was peculiar . . . I couldn't understand it. When do you expect to see her again? Will she come to New York?"

"After she returns from Europe," answered Chérie. "She is going to England to a wedding, and then to Paris . . . and she wants to help me, Nell, to be an artist like my father. I am, soon, to meet her friend who is a great, great artist. I shall meet her when Mrs. Wolfson comes back to America."

"This great artist is a lady?" asked Nell.

"Yes, Nell. A Religious of the Sacré Cœur and lives in a beautiful convent in Canada. She teaches there . . . she wants no fame . . . no money. . . ."

"Strange!" exclaimed Nell, "and the rest of us madly striving for both. . . . Is it right to bury one's talent?"

Chérie paused a second before replying, earnestly:

"She has not buried it, Nell . . . it is not dead! It is like a seed that is planted. It grows in the minds of her pupils . . . so . . . her talent is multiplied. . . ."

Her cousin glanced at her, and noted the rapt, faraway expression in the dark eyes. Chérie was in a world of her own making for a moment—as totally unconscious of Nell, as she was of her immediate surroundings.

And so they left the shop, and for a while wandered aimlessly along the boardwalk, glancing at the shop windows as they passed, with apparently little or no interest. But presently a fleecy shawl of purest white wool, displayed alluringly, attracted Nell, and she pointed it out to her cousin.

"That's what I've been looking for, Chérie. . . . I want that for Mother. Let us go in and see about it."

In they went to price, and view at closer range, this most desirable thing. But the place was crowded and the clerks were busy. At last, when their patience was almost exhausted, a girl, free for a moment, informed them that all knitted articles were in the rear of the store. That was something, at least. Perhaps they would find a clerk to wait on them, there.

"There, Nell!" exclaimed Chérie, motioning toward a counter heaped with bright-colored woolens; "the shawl is there also!"

"Yes, I see it. It is the counterpart of that one in the window," assented Nell, her eyes upon sweaters and shawls of many hues draped on a line strung above the counter, "but I'd like to be sure."

Here the clerks were also engaged in waiting upon others, and the girls would have to take their turn. Some small tables were grouped near them, at which

tea was being served, and a number of ladies were partaking of that beverage, supplemented by tiny rice cakes. As the girls stood there, the delicious aroma from the small silver teapots reached them, making them turn involuntarily. So they watched the busy waitresses flying from table to table. One had just deposited an order before a customer seated with her back to them, when Nell felt Chérie clutch her arm in a vise-like grip.

"Oh, Nell," she exclaimed, "that hat . . . it is the hat Aunt Eliza bought in Boston . . . the day we went shopping with her. It is Aunt Eliza's hat!"

"It's the same kind of hat!" admitted Nell, trying to catch a glimpse of the face under the many shades of green used in the construction of this rather remarkable headgear, "but I guess they turn those kind of things out by the dozen. Great Scott," as the one under observation turned slightly, "it is Aunt Eliza! What in the world is she doing here? . . . and alone?" And she rushed across the intervening space to the stout lady, placidly sipping from the cup she was holding so daintily in one podgy hand; leaving her cousin to follow at her leisure. Still dazed at the strangeness of it, Chérie hesitated.

"Aunt Eliza," called Nell, as Miss Eliza, attracted by the hurried footsteps behind her, turned her head, "What are you doing here?"

Astounded Miss Eliza bounded to her feet, as suddenly as a jack-in-the-box shoots from its pasteboard receptacle; and Nell grabbed her frantically with both hands to keep her balanced on her high-heeled shoes.

"Eleanor," she gasped, kissing her niece with her customary birdlike motion, "and Mehitable, too! Well, well, I must say I am glad to see you both!"

And Chérie came in for her share of the short, sharp little pecks, administered on each cheek.

"But Aunt Eliza," persisted Nell, assisting her to reseat herself at the table, "are you alone?"

"Bless you, no, child," she answered, puffing still from her late excitement, "Abigail is here. She's a delegate to the Convention."

"Oh, she would be," exclaimed Nell, "but that doesn't explain you."

"Abigail made me come. The other woman has the flu, and Abigail fixed it so's I could come."

"Well, what do you know about that? What's wrong with Aunt Abigail, do you suppose? Can she have had a change of heart?"

"I don't think so," replied Aunt Eliza, a trifle bewildered, "I am sure Abigail's heart is very strong."

"I'll tell the world it is," declared Nell, with considerable emphasis, "as strong as marble and as hard. Why this sudden kindly feeling for you? She's not usually so amiable!"

"I heard old Dr. King say I needed a trip of some kind," confided Miss Eliza, dropping her voice, "and the next day she told me to get ready for Atlantic City . . . and here we are!"

"And here we all are!" exclaimed Nell, laughing, but a speculative light was in her eyes as she gazed at Aunt Eliza. She didn't look so well! She was too stout, and she was too florid. Was Miss Abigail afraid of losing her sister? Or the handling of her bank account? Which? She had heard her father say that Miss Eliza's share would be divided at her death among her deceased sisters' heirs. In that case Abigail Greenwood would be out of luck if anything hap-

pened to Eliza—so it was up to her to care for her and prolong her life.

"Here we all are," repeated Miss Eliza, as if she enjoyed the sound of the words, "and Abigail ought to be here soon."

A little shudder passed over Chérie. Aunt Abigail! What would she say? Perhaps she would not speak to her at all! "Which would be as well," mused the girl, dismally, "if she is still angry."

"Here she comes," cried Aunt Eliza, and her nieces turned to watch Abigail Greenwood. Abigail Greenwood, as angular and as erect as ever, in her long black cloth coat, guiltless of adornment; her little close-fitting black hat, and her black silk gloves, too large for her thin, bony hands. At a glance, now, she took in the whole situation, tightening her thin lips perceptibly. But she greeted them civilly enough; even giving an impression of cordiality to the by-standers, who were curious.

"Surely you are not alone here?" she questioned, addressing herself to Nell to the exclusion of Chérie, who was standing between them.

"Oh no, we are not alone," answered Nell, resenting the intended slight to her cousin. "Father and Mother are with us, of course."

"And where are they now, Eleanor?" persistently ignoring Chérie. "I fail to see them."

"Well," returned Nell, dryly, "they are chair-riding. But they will be back for luncheon," glancing at her watch; "so let us go to the hotel and wait for them."

"I do not think so," objected Miss Abigail, taking from inside her coat an old-fashioned watch with a gold chain attached, "our train leaves at noon. We must hurry to make it."

"I should like to see Robert and his wife," wailed Miss Eliza, gazing about helplessly, as if trying to stem the onrushing tide of her sister's dominance.

Abigail glared at her, contemptuously. "And miss your train?" she said, sharply, "what nonsense!"

"I suppose so," murmured Miss Eliza, meekly. After all, Abigail could get around this place, and she couldn't. There was no use talking, she had a wonderful sister. She knew everything there was to be known. There was no one could get ahead of her. A good thing that she was so clever and reliable.

"Will you be kind enough to hurry, Eliza?" And Miss Abigail made an imperative motion with her hand, causing her sister to prepare, fussily, for immediate departure. After they had gone, Nell gazed at Chérie, and Chérie gazed at Nell. Well, that was that! And then both laughed, merrily.

"What do you wish to see, young ladies?" asked a clerk, coming toward them.

Startled, they turned and faced him, and for a second or so, stared blankly at their questioner. What was it they had wished to see?

"Oh, y—yes," faltered Nell, as the reason for being here flashed upon her, "a white shawl . . . like the one you have in the window."

"Then step this way, please," he said, "the shawls are on the counter . . . and you might as well have a choice."

A little later, as they were leaving the store, Nell remarked, with a gay laugh, "If I hadn't wanted this shawl for mother, we wouldn't have met the Greenwoods."

Chérie shot a swift glance toward her cousin, and Nell, encountering it, laughed again.

"And they were no prize packages, were they, Chérie?"

"Never mind, Nell," she replied, rather sedately, "the shawl is pretty . . . we may forget the rest."

But long after Nell was asleep, Chérie sat on the side of her bed, thinking, thinking. . . .

CHAPTER XXI

Rockaway Park

AFTER the delightful trip to Atlantic City, Chérie and Nell settled down to the usual routine of their daily life. It had been such a wonderful trip! They had enjoyed it so much! There was so much to talk about! And weeks later, the incidents which had occurred while in the City-by-the-Sea, furnished conversational topics that provided much entertainment for the family.

But day followed day, as days will. Time went on. It was now the last week in June. The finals had come and disappeared again into the discard of things gone by. The girls had passed their tests with considerable credit, and Chérie's drawings had made quite a sensation throughout the building. And now the school was closed, leaving its pupils free until the second week in September.

To-day, the Sodality girls and their friends were going to Rockaway Park on an excursion, but Chérie would have to go without Nell. Mrs. Brooks was quite ill this morning, and could not be left alone, with only Martha bustling about her work. Chérie begged to stay and help her cousin, but Nell objected.

"There's no need for both to stay," she assured Chérie, earnestly, "I'll take care of Mother myself and Daddy comes about four . . . so don't disappoint Betty."

Betty was Elizabeth Desmond, a friend Chérie had

made on her way to and from the May devotions. The devotions had been held nightly, during Our Lady's month, in the church further down the block that Chérie had attended since coming to New York. And it was from Betty she had procured the excursion tickets for Nell and herself. Betty was just fifteen, and went to Cathedral High, and the affection she and Chérie had for each other, was evident from their first meeting. So Nell was regaled with Betty's opinions and Betty's witty sayings, until, in self-defense, she demanded to meet this paragon. She wasn't a bit jealous, she wasn't that silly—but she would like to see this girl. And when she met her, Betty Desmond added another friend to her list. Chérie was delighted! That was just as she wanted it . . . she always craved Nell's approval.

"But you never said she was so pretty, Chérie," complained Nell, as they were waiting for the elevator; still feeling a little unreasonable irritation on account of Miss Betty's charms. "Did you never notice her eyes?" And she looked rather defiantly at her cousin.

"Of course," answered Chérie raising her brows slightly, in exaggerated surprise, "she has two, has she not?"

Nell laughed, her momentary ill-temper banished. "Of course, she has two, and what a pair! Real Irish blue with all those dark lashes about them . . . diamonds set in with dirty fingers, they say of eyes like hers."

"She is so nice, Nell," murmured Chérie.

"I know she is, Chérie . . . I like her; but I'll never see her without thinking of an anecdote Daddy tells of a famous Irish beauty, who was asked by an

old beggar for a spark from her eyes to light his pipe.''

And now the day was here, the day the three girls had so longed for! The hours of which they would have spent together on the beach! And Nell could not be with them! Sadly, Chérie and Betty left her, to meet the others at the station.

What a delightful day it was! The steady thud of the rollers breaking upon the white beach, sunlight everywhere, and a wonderful blue sky, flecked here and there with fleecy clouds. The bathers, their hands clutching the ropes that safeguarded them from danger spots; laughing with glee as the incoming breakers tossed them, or enveloped them completely, on their mad rush shorewards. The gay striped umbrellas, their long handles buried in the white sand, throwing their shade over the reclining occupants of the chairs; seeming like immense, gaudy flowers in a field of snow.

Hour after hour passed. The day was drawing to a close. It was now almost five by Chérie's watch. Betty had brought her small camera and had snapped her friend twice, posing her with the sea as a background each time.

''Now you take my picture, Chérie,'' Betty told her; ''just look in here, and when you can see the whole of me . . . press the button, so!'' And she handed the small black box to Chérie, who took it, in a gingerly manner, as if it might explode in the handling.

But she followed instructions, or thought she did; until she learned later that only Betty's trim little patent leather shoes appeared in the picture.

''I wish Mother had come . . . and Eileen and

Kitty,'' said Betty, regret in her tones, as she and Chérie were on the way to the depot, led and followed by the Sodality girls, all trying to make the seven-twenty train back to the City.

''Too bad!'' exclaimed Chérie, sympathetically, ''they should have come. They would have loved it, Betty.''

''But Mother couldn't . . . Gerald is coming home, to-day, from college. . . he'll be home before I get back.''

''And she must be there to welcome him! I do not like your Gerald. He should have stayed in college another day . . . so the little sisters could have enjoyed this!''

''You must not blame Gerald,'' championed Gerald's sister, ''Gerald is so good . . . some day he will be a great doctor.''

Chérie smiled. Why, she wanted to be a great artist! But she would say nothing about that to Betty, now. She would wait until she was surer of reaching her goal.

They were at the depot, and as these thoughts wandered through her brain, she said nothing in answer to Betty's last statement. Silently, the two girls, arm in arm, went through the waiting room; and out, along the platform, to the train.

The cars filled quickly, but fortunately, Chérie and Betty obtained seats together; and Chérie happened to be placed at the open window, giving her a clear view of the wonderful panorama of sea and sky as the train flew along on the trestles.

Water, water everywhere! And what a sky! A streak of cerise, showing through the pale gray told where the sun was sinking to rest. And as she gazed,

fascinated, the gray parted, revealing the encrimsoned, luminous orb, like a great ball of fire, throwing its hues upon the opalescent water below, tipping each rippling wavelet with brass, marking a golden path to the swiftly moving train.

It was after eight when Chérie returned. Nell met her at the door, and drew her into the living room. What had happened? Nell's eyes were red! She had been crying! The tears were still on her lashes, and on her pale cheeks. Chérie felt something come into her throat. Was Aunt Lottie worse? Was she . . .

"Oh, Chérie, we thought Mother was dying," faltered Nell, striving to still her sobs, "but she rallied, and the doctor says she may live."

Chérie's arm stole about her cousin. She couldn't speak. The lump in her throat was choking her. Why, oh why, had she not stayed with Nell? She felt guilty. Poor Nell, how she must have been suffering, while she was enjoying herself! Oh, the pity of it! Dear Aunt Lottie . . .

"She's asleep, now," went on her cousin, in a low tone, "and Daddy is with her, watching. The nurse wanted him to rest a little, but he wouldn't leave her . . . oh, if she'll only get better . . ."

She did get better, improving a little every day, but the doctor was not satisfied. She was too weak! She was not coming back fast enough!

"This climate is retarding her recovery," he complained to Robert Brooks. "She can't stay here . . . and live."

Mr. Brooks gave a startled glance at Nell, closing the door leading into her mother's room, as quietly as possible, wondering if she had heard. He hoped

not! How calmly the doctor was putting on his gloves! It was nothing to him, that death sentence! Nell's mother, his wife, was but the patient he had tried to help with his professional skill! That was all!

"She's strong enough to travel," went on the doctor, taking his hat; "especially when one takes into consideration the comforts that passengers enjoy today. I would advise Arizona. Ideal in her case."

"Arizona?" repeated Mr. Brooks. "My wife's folks live in Phoenix. She was born there."

"You had better get her there, at once, Mr. Brooks. Delays are dangerous."

"Oh, Daddy," cried Nell, after the door had closed upon the doctor, "has he no hope for Mother?"

"Why, of course he has, Nell," answered her father, as cheerfully as he could, placing his arm about her shoulders. "Didn't you hear him say Arizona would cure her?"

"Then let us go right away, Daddy . . . we must save her!"

"Yes, yes, Nell. Now, brace up . . . I need your help so much . . ." He kissed her, gently. "But first I must tell Mother about the trip," and Nell drew aside to let him enter her mother's room.

"I have a letter from Mrs. Brown, Nell," remarked Chérie, coming into the hall, at this moment, with a pink envelope in her hand.

Nell started. She had forgotten Chérie! What was to be done about her cousin? Where would she go? She couldn't go to Arizona with them. The relatives out there would probably object to a stranger. "From Mrs. Brown?" she repeated, after Chérie, without realizing the meaning of the words.

"Yes," said Chérie; "they wish me to spend some of my vacation on the farm . . . It would be nice,

when Aunt Lottie is better, to see the dear twins . . .''

A sigh of relief escaped Nell. Why, of course, the Browns! Now they could go away satisfied. Chérie would be safe and happy until their return.

CHAPTER XXII

Chérie Goes to the Browns

THE following day Chérie was on her way to Oldville. The Brooks were to leave on the night train, and she could still feel their good-by kisses on her lips. How she hoped that Aunt Lottie would soon be well! How she prayed for her . . . and for them all!

On the depot platform the twins were waiting. They literally dragged her to their father, who was patiently tinkering with his temperamental flivver, to ensure an uninterrupted return journey to the farm. For "Madame Elizabeth" was now showing age, being very much the worse for wear, and was fast nearing a place where all good flivvers go after their many parts are past repair.

"Glad to have you with us again for a spell, Chérie!" Pop Brown greeted, in his hearty way. "You know you cheated us, last time."

"And you'll have to make up for that, too!" declared Dash.

"And stay longer and longer and longer!" cried Dot, her two arms about Chérie. "And you won't go away 'cause we bother you with the pets . . . like Mom says you will?"

"No, no," promised Chérie, "I'll make you a long visit, this time. I'll stay until Nell comes back to New York."

"Now, Chérie, make yourself right at home," welcomed Mrs. Brown, embracing Chérie as she led her

into the house. "You are to do as you like and don't let Dot and Dash tease you with their nonsense."

But Chérie enjoyed Dot and Dash; she loved their nonsense and their pets, and went everywhere with them, carrying her sketch book, to the children's delight. She knew the names of the animals on the farm, from horses to kittens, and made many drawings of them. And how she laughed—for the naming of their four-legged friends had always been the particular business of the twins, and various and wonderful were the cognomens bestowed on the helpless beasts.

Of all the pets two cats amused her most, and it was with some surprise that she noticed, at the end of her first week on the Brown farm, how often White Sox and little Billy-Jo-cat gazed at her from the pages of her sketch book.

White Sox was an immense Maltese with white feet, and across his mouth a stripe of white gave him an appearance of ferocity that was a libel on a creature so gentle. Originally he came from Boston, and carried himself and his eleven years with great dignity—unless a string trailed by one of the twins caught his eye, and transformed him on the instant into a playful kitten. But he was self-centered and disliked other cats, while kittens he abhorred. So it was no wonder that Billy-Jo-cat, a tabby of a few months, brought the old cat's positive hatred upon himself by his unseemly actions. And no growling nor hissing on the part of White Sox had any effect on this senseless, irrepressible bit of electrified fur, that bounded out at him from the most unthought-of places, startling him out of his usual dignity to such an extent that his antics to escape unexpected onslaughts made the Browns shout with laughter. This was too much for White Sox. Actually he would be so downcast

afterward, that Pop Brown feared he might die from chagrin. So he built him a retreat in the old apple tree near the kitchen door; and here White Sox basked in the sun, lulled by the whispering leaves, and high above the reach of impudent, overfriendly youngsters.

The long, hot July days went by. Nell's letters came regularly. Letters full of hope for her dear mother's recovery. She was much stronger. They would soon be back in New York.

But this morning one had come—a narrow black line edging the envelope. Chérie opened it with sinking heart. Nell's mother was dead! She had died quite suddenly, and was buried in the old churchyard where the names of so many of her relatives were carved on the scattered tombstones about her, Nell wrote briefly. "Daddy and I are coming back, Chérie, without her. We are going first to the Greenwoods', and shall soon see you. I may stay with them until things can be better arranged for us all . . ."

"Poor Nell, poor Nell!" murmured Chérie, feeling within her own breast the old heartache. Nell was suffering as she had suffered! Nell knew what sorrow was now! "Oh, if I could help her as she helped me! Dear Nell! Dear God, strengthen her to bear this burden."

The days that followed were filled with expectation for Chérie. Any hour might bring Nell. She watched and waited, her mind concentrated on her cousin and her cousin's grief, to the exclusion of her old pursuits and pleasures on the farm. The twins were indignant. They resented her apparent lack of interest in themselves and their pets. In vain they tried to awaken the spirit of comradeship in their much-loved friend. She was not herself. Their Chérie had been

turned into a self-absorbed young person, and they couldn't understand it, appealing in perplexity to their mother.

"Chérie feels sad," she told them, "but she'll be different when her cousin Nell comes."

"Huh!" ejaculated Dash in a tone of disgust, "and that Nell will take her away again! I bet you a doughnut that's why she's coming! That's all she's good for, seems to me!"

"There now," chided his mother. "You have Dot crying . . . and you know nothing at all about it."

"Well," he declared angrily, "if she tries any of her tricks, and I hear her, I'll ——"

"Nonsense," rebuked Mrs. Brown, "you must not make threats. It isn't a bit manly, Dash . . . and you don't mean it, either."

Dash reddened. His mother knew him. He couldn't fool her with his bluster. She knew he wouldn't hurt a fly if he could help it.

Chérie was becoming more and more anxious about Nell and Uncle Bob. What could be detaining them? It was almost two weeks since she had received Nell's letter, conveying the impression that they were on their way east. She wondered if Aunt Abigail had heard from them, and then, quite suddenly, decided to find out. So calling Dot and Dash into consultation, which was as balm to their wounded feelings, the expedition was arranged for the afternoon.

"I wish to see my aunts," said Chérie, pleasantly, to Sarah, as the grim-visaged woman demanded her business a few hours later.

"Well, they're out!" she snapped, closing the door with a bang.

That was all! There was nothing left for Chérie to do but to leave. Slowly she retraced her steps down

the path to the gate. The twins were waiting outside, perched high on the wagon seat, their bright-stockinged legs, as usual, swinging backwards and forwards.

"Here she is!" cried little Dot, gleefully; and as Chérie came toward them, she continued, "I was afraid they'd keep you ever so long when they got you in there."

"No." There was bitterness in the tone of her voice. "They do not love me—as you do."

Dot looked at her wonderingly, unable to believe that there was a person living who did not love Chérie as she did.

"All set?" asked Dash, in his grown-up manner, after Chérie climbed in. He was in a hurry. For this morning he had located some tiny baby rabbits behind an old disused barn in one of the outlying fields; and he wanted Chérie to see them before she relapsed again into the very uncongenial person of the past two weeks. So he whistled to urge old Jack to be on his way, slapping the reins on his bony back, at the same time. Just then Thomas, the Misses Greenwood's hired man, hailed them from the side lawn, where he was weeding the flower beds, and Dash felt a light touch on his arm.

"Wait, Dash," whispered Chérie, "Thomas wishes to speak to us."

"Glad to see you, missy," called Thomas, approaching. "But why are you going? Didn't you see your aunts?"

"My aunts are not at home," answered Chérie.

"Who told you that?" demanded the old man.

"Sarah," returned Chérie.

"Drat the woman!" he said angrily; "so that's

what she said. I wonder why . . . I just passed the back porch—they're both there."

"Don't blame Sarah, Thomas . . . they told her to say that . . . they did not wish to see me," declared Chérie, sadly, and with conviction.

Thomas shook his head slowly, as the young folks drove away. "So that's the way they treat poor Fred Lawson's girl," he muttered, going back to the bed he had been weeding. "It's all Miss Abigail's fault. . . . What a pill she is!"

CHAPTER XXIII

Chérie's Hopes Are Realized

THE next morning Chérie received a letter, but not from Nell. This was postmarked Boston, and at once she knew it was from Mrs. Wolfson. She was back from Europe! Would she remember her promise? Would Chérie meet that great artist? With trembling fingers the girl opened the envelope, and read the following:

"MY DEAR LITTLE CHÉRIE:

"Yesterday I arrived in New York. I thought of you at once, and went to the address you had given me when we met in Atlantic City. But you were not there, and I feared you had again gone out of my life. The superintendent told me of Mrs. Brooks' illness and said the family had gone to Arizona that she might recuperate. Then I asked if you had also gone, explaining how anxious I was to see you, and he kindly gave me your present address. Write to me, dear, that I may be sure of finding you, and I'll be with you as fast as my car can make it."

Chérie answered, immediately, telling her of the sorrow that had come into her cousins' lives, and how unsettled everything now was.

"I do not know what they intend to do. Uncle Bob may not care to have the home. He and Nell may board. I am expecting to see them soon, and then shall know what all this may mean for me. . . ."

"Poor child," thought Mrs. Wolfson, reading the little note. "Poor, lonely little girl!" she murmured

aloud, glancing about the luxurious room, "and poor lonely me." And with a sigh she touched a button, ordering the man who appeared to have the car in readiness at once.

To Chérie it was another day, and that meant renewed hope. Eagerly, she ran down the old red-brick path to the road, but the mail box was empty. Disappointed, she turned away. How hot it was! The sun seemed to be shriveling up everything with its fierce rays. She stepped from the path to the shade under the trees, and glanced back at the road, white in the dazzling light of the August sun. She could hardly expect to see Mrs. Wolfson so soon. It was quite a distance from Boston, even if she had received her note in the first mail. But clouds of dust attracted her, and she walked back to the old stone fence as a car slowed down at the gate.

"Does Mr. Brown live here?" inquired the chauffeur, touching his cap, but before Chérie could answer, Mrs. Wolfson had stepped from the car and was beside her.

"Oh, Chérie!" she cried, kissing the girl's cheeks, and fondly gazing into her eyes, "I am so glad to see you. Drive on, Wells," she ordered, turning toward the man, "and call for me in an hour." And the car promptly disappeared.

"Come into the house, please, Mrs. Wolfson," invited Chérie, clinging lovingly to her dear friend, "it is so much cooler there."

"No, my dear, not yet. I have so much to say that must be said to you alone. We shall find some little nook where we can be undisturbed . . . somewhere out here, under those trees."

"Lovers' Bench is there," Chérie told her. "See," pointing toward two beautiful trees, with a board

placed between them; "when they were but saplings somebody put that board there, and as the trees grew, they grew around it . . . and it is quite safe."

"Who named it?" asked Mrs. Wolfson.

"Nobody knows," replied Chérie, her cheeks pink from the pleasure of this meeting. "It was so long ago . . . nobody remembers."

"Have you heard from your cousin Nell yet?" inquired the lady, when they were seated side by side, on Lovers' Bench.

"Not one word," answered Chérie. "Every day is so long . . . but she must come soon."

"Surely," agreed her friend, and there was a serious expression on her face. "I am glad she is not here yet. To me, there seems but one thing for you, yet you must decide for yourself."

Chérie caught her breath, and gazed at her expectantly. What was she going to say? "Yes?" she murmured.

"I feel that it is a privilege to help you, Chérie . . . so I shall take you to that convent where my friend is . . . and she will teach you, and some day you will be the artist of your dreams."

Silently, Chérie stared into the depths of Katherine Wolfson's somber eyes. Words refused to pass her lips, so elated was she at this wonderful thing that was coming to her. She was to have her chance!

"I have told you of this friend," she went on, earnestly. "She and I were girls together . . . and I was with her in Paris when she gave up fame and fortune to serve God."

She paused, evidently overcome by the memory of that renunciation of the pomps and vanities of this world by a girl whose ambition had known no bounds,

whose success in Art had been assured by acclamation.

"The course takes four years," continued the sweet voice, "and your holidays you will spend with me. . . . Will you go, Chérie?"

"Oh, Mrs. Wolfson," she faltered, "how shall I thank you? Oh, oh," and tears of gratitude blinded her, "I can only love you!"

"Chérie, I want your love!" she whispered, clasping her arms about the young girl. "I need it so, my dear child!"

The grating sound of hastily applied brakes startled them, and they glanced through the trees to the road. A taxicab had stopped in front of the gate, and the driver was leaning out to open the door for his passengers.

"It is Nell, it is Nell!" cried Chérie, disengaging herself from the loving arms about her, and springing to her feet, "and Uncle Bob!"

Afterwards she could never remember the manner of greeting she bestowed on her cousins, so excited was she at the time. But finally, she led them to Lovers' Bench to meet Mrs. Wolfson, who arose as they came toward her. And then, while their elders were conversing, the girls wandered under the trees, and Nell told Chérie of her dear mother's last days and of the long, lonesome journey to Oldville.

"It was after nine when our trains got in last night, and Thomas was at the depot to meet us. Can you imagine it, Chérie . . . I was really glad when I saw Aunt Abigail and Aunt Eliza!"

"Yes, Nell. I was like that. . . . I, too, craved for their love and sympathy. . . ."

Nell glanced at her, pity in her eyes. "And a

precious lot they gave you! My heart ached for you then, Chérie . . . but I didn't really understand. . . . I know, now. . . ."

"Nell, dear, I have news for you," Chérie broke in, wishing to turn her cousin's mind from her grief. "Mrs. Wolfson is sending me to that convent where her friend, the artist, teaches. Isn't that wonderful?"

Nell let her arms drop down with a little hopeless motion. "And you are going, Chérie? I'll be alone."

"Not alone, Nell . . . you have your father," Chérie reminded her. But she felt conscience-stricken. If Nell felt like that about her going to school, she would not go. She would tell Mrs. Wolfson that she could not leave Nell. . . .

"I'm sorry I said that, Chérie," apologized Nell; "it just slipped out. Daddy doesn't know what he is going to do. He says we'll have to board, and he is so worried about leaving us among strangers. He'll be delighted to hear that you are going to school; at least you will have every care in a convent."

"Well, Chérie, Mrs. Wolfson has been telling me of the wonderful offer she made you," remarked Robert Brooks, as the girls strolled back again to Lovers' Bench. "I can't tell you how relieved I am about your future. . . . I wish Nell could be in as safe keeping."

Mrs. Wolfson shot a swift glance at Nell's father, but remained silent. Stranger things had happened —why not this?

"Let her come with me, Uncle Bob?" pleaded Chérie, clasping and unclasping her hands in her agitation.

Robert Brooks started, gazing first at Chérie, and then at Nell, his eyes finally resting on Mrs. Wolfson's

with a puzzled expression in their depths. He knew nothing of convents himself, but had heard some of his friends praise them. "Why not?"

"Why not?" persisted Chérie. "Nell and I would be together, Uncle Bob."

"Why not, Mr. Brooks?" repeated Katherine Wolfson, smiling. "If I were in your place, I would consider it a way out of a dilemma."

"It does seem the only logical thing to do," he admitted, "under present conditions."

"It is," she retorted, "and you will not regret it. You could go about your business with a clear conscience; knowing your daughter was perfectly safe." And she placed her arm about Nell, drawing her closer, affectionately.

"What do you think about it, Nell?" queried her father, anxiously searching her face with his eyes. "You are the one who must decide!"

Nell was silent, her gaze fixed upon him, perplexed, uncertain. But a new light was in her eyes, and her pale cheeks were flushed. It was so sudden! She could not think! To go with Chérie to the Sacré Cœur! Such an idea had not occurred to her, and yet she liked it. Her father would be away so much this year, too! She was glad of that. The firm had acquired other interests which required his presence farther afield, and he would be from home a great deal. This he had told her in the taxi on their way here. And Nell, though her heart ached miserably, was glad of that, too—she could not bear to think of him as he had been since her mother's death—silent, brooding, unhappy; sitting, bent over, in his chair . . . seeing before him nothing . . . but a blank future. If she consented to go, his anxiety on her ac-

count would be lightened . . . and she would be with Chérie. . . .

"I guess it will have to be the convent, Daddy," she said, quietly, "it seems the only way to straighten things out."

CHAPTER XXIV

The Convent of the Sacré Cœur

AND while this conference was being held, as described in the foregoing chapter out under the trees, Mom Brown was bustling about her house, preparing a luncheon for Chérie's friends.

From the kitchen window she had seen the beautiful lady in gray clasp the girl in her arms, and on the instant knew her to be Mrs. Wolfson, of whom Chérie had told her so much. It was very warm, and this good friend, who had been so kind to Chérie, must have, at least, a good cup of tea. And so Mrs. Brown turned away to put the kettle on the range, opening the draughts to brighten the smoldering wood within, watching until the flames burst forth.

She felt grateful to this woman for her kindness to their dear Chérie, and wished in some way to convey her thankfulness. She would set the table in the living room, and make the meal a gala affair. As she passed the window again on her way to the other room, she glanced out. Mrs. Wolfson and Chérie were no longer in sight, but stepping from a taxi drawn up before the gate, was a man. Who was he? And who was the slender young girl he was assisting from the cab? Then, the next moment, Chérie came, running swiftly into the other girl's arms. She was answered. That was Nell! And Nell's father! There was no time to lose. She must get the luncheon as quickly as possible. Too bad that Pop was not home, to-day of all days! How he would like to renew his old friendship with

Robert Brooks! Well, that couldn't be helped, now. But where were the children?

As if in response to this thought, the back door swung open, and Dot and Dash scampered in, breathless from excitement.

"Oh, that old cousin Nell is here!" panted Dash in a tone of the deepest disgust; "I bet she's after Chérie!"

"Her father, too," supplemented Dot, pursing up her lips. "He came along!"

"It never rains but it pours," laughed their mother, "so you will have to help me. Here, Dash, fill this with water," handing the rather rebellious youngster a glass pitcher; "and, Dot, get some flowers from the garden . . . some love-in-a-mist, and anything else that's pretty."

She smiled as they hurried away to do her bidding. Were there ever such darling children? She pulled the gate-leg table into the center of the room, and from the top drawer of the highboy selected her finest tablecloth, which she spread with great care, smoothing all the wrinkles out with her hands. To a small closet, built in the wall, she went next, and from its depths brought forth her most valued wedding gifts: a dainty set of blue-and-white china, some silver, and some glassware.

"Here are the flowers, Mom!" called Dot, from the kitchen, "and Dash has filled the pitcher to the brim."

"Well, pour a little out, Dash, and put the flowers in . . . and bring it here."

"Oh, are we going to eat in here?" gasped Dot, an expression of awe coming into her wide-open blue eyes as she entered the living room, followed by Dash, carrying the pitcher of flowers.

"Of course," answered Dash, in as matter-of-fact a tone as he could assume after such a surprise; "aren't we having company?"

Mrs. Brown placed the flowers in the center of the glittering table, rearranged the platters of white sliced chicken, and pink sliced ham; the halves of red tomatoes, heaped with mayonnaise on beds of green, at every place; the tiny biscuits, and the ruby-colored jelly. The twins watched her, fascinated, delighted; and noting their approval, the mother was satisfied. After all, the best critics are children, as yet too little versed in the world's ways to render a dishonest opinion.

It was an hour later. The impromptu party had been a success. Mrs. Wolfson and Mrs. Brown were exchanging confidences, and Robert Brooks had made friends with the twins.

"I'll finish my course in two years, Chérie," Nell was saying to her cousin, "and you'll be a year and a half longer."

"Yes, Nell . . . I know that," assented Chérie, rather dismally, "yet Mrs. Wolfson says it is a college, too."

"It is," interrupted Mrs. Wolfson, "where one may get all kinds of degrees." She looked questioningly at Mr. Brooks.

"Nell must select her own college," he said, quietly, "I'll leave that entirely to her judgment and inclination."

"Which will be very wise, Mr. Brooks," she agreed, smiling, "especially as your daughter has shown such excellent judgment in her choice to-day. And now," she continued, thoughtfully, "I shall write, at once, to the Mother Superior, and make arrangements for Nell as well as Chérie, if you wish, Mr. Brooks. . . ."

"I'd be eternally grateful, Mrs. Wolfson," in a relieved tone; "I'm not up to that sort of business."

Katherine Wolfson smiled again, a whimsical little smile. "I thought so! Well, worry no more about the arrangements . . . all you will have to do for Nell will be to pay the bills."

"That's the easiest part," he returned, "though I feel a bit ashamed when I think of Chérie. . . . You shouldn't assume all the expense. . . ."

"Please, Mr. Brooks," she faltered, her voice pleading in its tones now; "leave me that consolation . . . please. . . ."

"Why, certainly," acquiesced Robert Brooks, hastily, noticing her emotion; "if you present it in that light, I have nothing more to say."

"And that's that!" whispered Nell to Chérie, giving her cousin's hand a loving little pat as she arose from the table. Mrs. Wolfson was about to leave and was speaking to her father, offering them the use of her car to bring them back to the old Greenwood mansion.

After the guests had departed, Dash remained at the window, staring out, dismally. Chérie glanced at him and wondered, as she flitted in and out from the living room to the kitchen, carrying out the china, glassware and silver to be washed.

"What is wrong?" she asked, going to him after depositing a pile of plates on the table—later Mrs. Brown would put them back in the small closet, herself. "Are you sorry they have gone away?"

He shook his head, and angrily rubbed his hand across his eyes, to rid himself of the telltale drops trembling on his lashes. "I just wish she'd stay away, that's all!" he blurted out in a disgusted tone.

"Who, Dash?" asked Chérie, in surprise; "what are you saying?"

"That cousin of yours, that Nell! I never liked her. She always wanted you . . . and now she's taking you away. . . ."

"She isn't taking me away, Dash! We are going to the same school," she explained, as Dot came in with some silver, clutched tightly in both chubby hands. "You understand, do you not, dear?"

Dot, being thus addressed, nodded assent, but she said nothing. She was her brother's champion, and would not take sides against him, but she stood staring at him, and there was a pleading expression in her big blue eyes. This was too much for Dash, who turned hastily and rushed from the room and down the path to the gate; kicking imaginary obstacles from his path as he ran, registering dissatisfaction with all about him.

Dot blushed. "Dash doesn't mean to be so rude," excused the faithful little sister, wishing to keep her hero on his pedestal; "he just feels awful bad 'cause you're going——"

"But I would have to go soon," Chérie interrupted, "and I love him more and more. . . . Uncle Bob will send you something nice. He said so."

A few days later, two bicycles were delivered at the farm. Pop Brown surveyed them from the stable door, with old Jack looking over his shoulder. They were for the twins from Robert Brooks, who feared that some day old Jack would drop dead, he wrote, thus compelling Dot and Dash to use shank's mare.

"Which would be rather a shabby thing to happen to two such regular little fellows," he remarked to Mr. and Mrs. Brown that same evening, "so I thought I had better insure them against such a comedown."

"Things seem to be coming your way, kiddies," declared Pop Brown after Robert Brooks had gone. He was still eyeing the costly gifts dubiously. He didn't altogether approve! He hoped it was not in payment for the little they had done for Chérie!

"Nonsense, John, don't be so sensitive!" admonished his wife. "He likes the twins. Who wouldn't?"

Pop Brown laughed. "I guess they are pretty likable youngsters," he agreed, glancing proudly at the twins in the distance, managing the unruly wheels wonderfully well for beginners; "and they're as smart as can be, too!"

And now September was here, and in a week, Chérie would be on her way to school. Nell and her father were in New York, boarding. Robert Brooks had put his furniture in storage until such time as he could have Nell for his housekeeper. This he told her to keep up her spirits, after they left the dismantled apartment where they had been so happy.

Chérie heard from Nell every day or so, and this morning, she received a letter from Betty Desmond, vowing eternal friendship.

"And I have had that snapshot of you enlarged. It is in a lovely silver frame, and so pretty that I call it 'The Sea-queen.' I look at it every day."

"Dear Betty," said Chérie to herself, "when shall I see you again?" And she kissed the little missive covered with girlish, half-formed characters. How sweet she was! How true! She wondered if Nell would see her before leaving New York. Poor Nell! How sorry she felt for her. She, also, had seen her home broken up, and knew all it meant. She had lost everything, except the shrouded canvas that Monsieur le Curé had carried to his house, and was keeping for her. The canvas on which Fred Lawson had built

such hopes for success . . . the dream that had not come true!

And now she was to be an artist, as her father had been! How strange it all was! And how she would pray for success! How she would study . . . and work. . . .

It was a week later. The September afternoon was warm, and sunshine flooded the dormitory, where Chérie and Nell were unpacking their small traveling bags. Each had been assigned a little white bed, one beside the other, and about these hung curtains of bleached cotton; which, when drawn together, formed the space within into a tiny room.

"I couldn't swing a cat around in here with these closed," muttered Nell, touching the curtains and glancing about, petulantly.

Chérie laughed, merrily. "Just as well! Cats are not allowed here . . . they are kept in the kitchens."

"You're getting smarter by the minute, since we came, I'll tell the world," returned Nell, with a little grimace, at which her cousin laughed again. "Everything pleases Chérie now," she thought, gazing at her. "Why not? She's surely coming into her own."

An hour ago they had arrived with Mrs. Wolfson in her big blue car, after a delightful trip through Canadian territory. But they were both anxious to reach the end of the journey, and were pleased when the chauffeur swung the car through the gates, wide open for the convenience of returning pupils,—revealing the smooth drive within, lined with magnificent trees, their extended branches intertwining, forming a canopy overhead. And then, quite suddenly, around a curve, was the stately pile of brick and marble . . . the convent of the Sacré Cœur.

"Oh!" gasped Chérie, her eyes shining, her lips parted, smiling, "what a beautiful place! Look, Nell!"

"You've said it!" replied Nell, glancing about, "it is some place, and I don't mean maybe."

Katherine Wolfson was pleased by their enthusiastic praise of the convent she loved and said so; placing an arm about each of the girls as they went up the shallow marble steps to await the opening of the heavily carved door by the aged portress within.

And after that they had met so many that they were still uncertain of who was who among their future teachers.

"The Little Madame is the artist," declared Chérie with conviction, "her eyes are wonderful! I am sure she knew my thoughts, Nell."

"Glad you warned me, Chérie . . . I'll contrive to be absent-minded when the Little Madame is around . . . it's bad enough when they hear what you say." And Nell gave a comical little twist to her lips, making Chérie laugh again.

"Oh, Nell!" she cried, "how lonely I should be without you, . . . and your little jokes."

A light-toned bell broke in upon them. It was ringing from somewhere outside. Chérie glanced at her watch. It was the Angelus! And then she stood motionless, her lips moving in prayer, her lids lowered.

Nell turned away, a slight feeling of irritation possessing her. She felt out of it for the moment. What consolation this cousin of hers seemed to derive from her religion! It was wonderful . . . beautiful!

"We should be in the refectory, Nell," came Chérie's voice, startling Nell from her thoughts; "Madame Ouilette told us six o'clock."

"Yes, but she said they were lenient to-day,

Chérie," replied Nell; "school is not really opened yet . . . not until to-morrow."

"But—but all the girls will stare at us as we enter, Nell," deplored Chérie, timidly.

"Well, suppose they do?" retorted her cousin, airily, "we're not hard to look at!"

Chérie glanced at her, puzzled, and Nell laughed. What a little goose Chérie was! She didn't even know she was pretty!

"And when they know us well," went on Nell, teasingly, "they'll surely fall for us!"

"Now you make me laugh, Nell!"

"Then why don't you laugh, Chérie? The dictionary says a laugh is a convulsive sound caused by merriment—and you're as still as a mouse."

"Ah, my Nell," assented Chérie, "my heart laughs because I am here . . . because you and I are together, Nell. Oh, I am so happy, so content!"

THE END

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